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THAT'S LIFE

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE DIRECT CONSEQUENCES OF
LIFE-SENTENCE IMPRISONMENT FOR ADULT MALES
WITHIN THE IRISH PRISON SYSTEM.**

BY CLARA GEANEY

**That's Life -
An Examination of the Direct Consequences of Life-
Sentence Imprisonment for Adult Males within the
Irish Prison System.**

A thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for award of Masters (M.A.) in
Criminology

By
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‘Never in living memory have democratic societies resorted to locking away so many of their fellow citizens and at the same time been so indifferent to the consequences’.

O’Sullivan and O’Donnell (2007: 28)

To Isabella.

ABSTRACT

Although Ireland compares relatively well in terms of international crime rates, there has been an increase in the number of prisoners serving life-sentences in the Republic. The current system for managing life-sentence prisoners in this jurisdiction is that they are likely to earn their temporary release after having served about fifteen years in prison. However, there is limited research in Ireland on the effects of imprisonment, and certainly for life-sentence prisoners, criminology in the Republic has failed to examine the issues faced by this group at all. Very little is understood about the coping mechanisms specific to life-sentence prisoners; the challenges they face in terms of their prison experience and resettlement. This paper focuses on the direct consequences of imprisonment – the psycho-sociological impact of time spent in prison and how this bears upon life-sentence prisoners' resettlement. These issues are tackled through examining available literature, both within Ireland and internationally and by interviewing life-sentence prisoners on temporary release in the community. The researcher has identified the issues faced by life-sentence prisoners within the prison walls; the varying coping methods employed; and resettlement experiences. It is found that although there are some common themes, the experiences of this group of prisoners can vary enormously. The study concludes that not enough is known about the challenges faced by life-sentence prisoners and considerably more research needs to be carried out.

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise to the reader what is contained within the following paper and to demonstrate the rationale behind the choice of research topic and its relevance to Irish criminology. This chapter briefly outlines the current situation with life-sentences in Ireland. Following on from this the researcher will present the research objectives and research questions being posed in this study.

1.1 Summary.

Chapter one focuses on introducing the research topic at hand; the rationale behind this choice and the research questions being posed. Chapter two examines the context of the topic in Irish society. Chapter three looks at the available literature on the prison experience for life-sentence prisoners and Chapter four examines the psychological impact of this sentence. Chapter five analyses the literature on prison coping and looks at this in relation to life-sentence prisoners. Chapter six describes the research methodology chosen for this study, and how the research questions posed generated a qualitative methodology. Chapter seven presents the findings of this study thematically and Chapter eight discusses these findings. In Chapter 9, the researcher presents recommendations in terms of both the future management of life-sentence prisoners and in terms of future research in this area.

1.2 Rationale for and Scope of Research.

International criminology has witnessed burgeoning literature which explores the direct and indirect consequences of imprisonment. The direct consequences are those associated with what are termed by Sykes (1958) as the *pains of imprisonment*; the indirect consequences are described as the legal and structural difficulties more associated with prisoner re-settlement (Maruna and Immarigeon, 2004).

There is limited research in Ireland on the effects of imprisonment, and certainly for life-sentence prisoners criminology in the Republic has failed to examine the issues faced by this group at all. Penal populism within the media and

at societal and Governmental levels continues to ignore the problems associated with long-term imprisonment (Crawley and Sparks, 2006; Petersilia, 2001) even though the detrimental effects of imprisonment upon the prisoner physically, psychologically and socially, are well documented (Huey and McNulty, 2005; Jamieson and Grounds, 2002; Sykes, 1958).

Although Ireland compares relatively well in terms of international crime rates, there has been an increase in the number of prisoners serving life-sentences in the Republic (O'Donnell *et al*, 2008). A number of factors can be attributed to this country's increase in life-sentence prisoners. Firstly, the Republic has witnessed a steady increase in murder convictions over the last number of years, due in part to an increase in drug-related gangland disputes (The Irish Times, 2008; O'Keeffe, 2008). Secondly, a recent landmark reveals that for the first time a judge has passed a life-sentence upon a man convicted of murder for using a car as a weapon (Boyes, 2008) clearly setting a precedent for the future. And thirdly, with the introduction of mandatory minimum sentencing, there has been a significant increase in the number of prisoners serving life-sentences for crimes other than murder (Bacik, 2002; The Irish Times, 2008; Kilcommmins *et al*, 2004).

Due to increasing numbers of life-sentence prisoners and in light of the fact that a life-sentence rarely means that a prisoner spends the rest of their living days behind prison walls (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2008; The Irish Times, 2008; Wikberg and Foster, 1990), it is clear to this researcher there is a greater need now to understand the impact of a life-sentence than perhaps ever before. However, the scope of topic requires that the researcher place some limits upon the breadth of what shall be examined. Although the indirect consequences of imprisonment are well documented (Maguire and Raynor, 2006; Maruna, 2004; Maruna and Immerigeon, 2004; Ruddell and Winfree, 2006), this study focuses on the direct consequence of imprisonment. What is of concern here is the psychosociological impact of the prison sentence itself and what bearing this has on the prisoner post-release.

1.3 Research Objectives.

- To identify the current situation with life-sentence prisoners in the Republic.
- To examine the direct consequences of life-sentence imprisonment.
- To examine the coping methods employed by life-sentence prisoners.
- To examine the re-integration issues for life-sentence prisoners.
- To examine the life-sentence prisoner resettlement policy and practice in the Republic.
- To explore the resettlement experiences of life-sentence prisoners.
- To make recommendations for the management of life-sentence prisoners and future research in the area.

1.4 Research Questions.

1. What are the direct consequences of life-sentence imprisonment?
2. How does the life-sentence prisoner cope with their incarceration?
3. What is the resettlement experience for life-sentence prisoners'?

CHAPTER 2

2. THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

The following chapter examines the life-sentence prisoners in an Irish context. The number of life sentence prisoners in this jurisdiction is outlined and the current policy and practice for resettlement of this group is explored.

2.1 Life-sentence prisoners – the Irish context.

2.1.1 The Number of Life-Sentence Prisoners in Ireland.

Although homicide is “statistically a rare event” (Regoeczi *et al*, 2008: 147), the Republic of Ireland has witnessed an increase in murder convictions over the last number of years (CSO, 2008). In 2007, there were 78 murder convictions in Ireland, a 30% increase on 2006 (CSO, 2008), resulting in an increase in life-sentence prisoners. In 2005, there were 181 people serving life-sentences in Ireland (IPS, 2005) in comparison to the current 250 (O’Keeffe, 2008).

2.1.2 Eligibility for Parole.

According to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2008):

“A life sentence lasts for life. However, as is the case in a number of countries, not all of the sentence is generally served in prison custody. The granting of temporary or early release to life-sentenced prisoners is a feature of prison systems internationally and in Ireland”.

Life-sentence prisoners, who are eligible¹, meet with the Parole Board, hereon in the Board, seven years into their sentence and meet with the Board on a yearly basis for a number of years before a decision as to whether or not to grant temporary release is made (Parole Board, 2005). The question of temporary release for life-sentence prisoners is one of privilege not of right (The Irish Times, 2007).

2.1.3 Function of The Parole Board.

The Board’s principle function is to advise the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the management of long-term prisoners (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), 2008). The Board consider the facts of the

¹ Prisoners who have been found guilty of the murder of a member of the Gardai or Irish Prison Service in the line of duty, a head of State (either Irish or foreign) or whose crime is found to have been politically motivated are not eligible for Parole (Parole Board, 2005).

case; the prisoner's attitude toward the crime; whether or not the prisoner can demonstrate their rehabilitation; the level of risk posed to the community; the prisoner's behaviour within prison and their engagement with prison programmes to determine whether or not to recommend temporary release (Parole Board, 2005).

Although the Board are charged with the responsibility of making recommendations, it is the Minister who makes the ultimate decision and is under no obligation to accept the recommendations of the Board (The Irish Times, 2007). Notwithstanding, the recommendations of the Board are accepted in the majority (80%) of cases (Parole Board, 2005).

2.1.4 Granting of Temporary Release and Supervision.

Life-sentence prisoners who have satisfied the conditions and recommendations of the Board are released into the community. The DJELR (2008) state that the length of time spent in custody by offenders serving life-sentences can vary substantially, although they do not indicate by how much; according to one report, 55% of life-sentence prisoners serve 9-12years in prison and 16% serve between 13-20years (O'Keeffe, 2008).

Upon release, life-sentence prisoners are subject to a Supervised Temporary Release programme and remain *On-Licence* for the remainder of their life (Probation Service, 2008). The Probation Service is currently responsible for 60 life-sentence prisoners within the community (ibid). Supervised Temporary Release means that the life-sentence prisoner remains under the supervision of the Probation Service for the rest of their lives and are governed by restrictions placed on them by the DJELR with regard to their conduct and where they can live and work (Probation Service, 2008). A breach of these conditions, or any misconduct can result in their re-arrest and detention at the Minister's discretion (DJELR, 2008).

2.1.5 Sentencing and Penal Policy.

As in the UK (Ashworth, 2007), there have been recent calls in Ireland to reform the current sentencing practices for murder convictions (The Irish Times, 2008). The Law Reform Commission (LRC) have recommended a change in the mandatory life-sentence for murder to allow room for judges to take account of the

details of the case when passing sentence, but this has been met with public and political resilience (The Irish Times, 2008). It is argued that to reduce the life-sentence tariff, would contradict the retributive and deterrent ideologies informing the sentencing of those convicted of murder (James, 2005).

Penal policy has witnessed a redefinition of punishment from rehabilitation to deterrence and incapacitation (Mascini and Houtman, 2006; Toch, 2007). The act of sentencing people to life satisfies a political and societal need for punishment and proportionality in sentencing (Richardson and Freiberg, 2004) and for prisons to act as a “quarantine zone” by removing from society those who are most feared (O’Sullivan and O’Donnell, 2007: 27).

The literature indicates an 11% increase in prison committals between 2005 and 2006 (O’Keeffe, 2008), notwithstanding the total number of prison committals has in fact decreased since 2004 (Coulter, 2008; O’Sullivan and O’Donnell, 2007). The fastest expanding group of prisoners in Irish prisons are those on life-sentences (Coulter, 2008). The Irish Government’s response to these figures has been penal expansion through the development of Thornton Hall, a new prison facility designed to replace the antiquated Mountjoy prison in Dublin city centre (Coulter, 2008; IPS, 2006; Lally, 2006). By focussing resources on penal expansion, attention is then diverted from the issues of rehabilitation and reintegration (ACJRD, 2007; Craig, 2004; Lally, 2006; Lovegrove, 2007; Richardson and Freiberg, 2004).

Penal policy has always been a political game of balancing offenders’ needs with those of society (Ruddell and Winfree, 2006). This being particularly so in cases of murder, which continue to be a political hot potato due to the very nature of the crime at hand (Appleton and Grøver, 2007; Ashworth, 2007). With regard to public opinion, a growing media emphasis on gangland killings² forces society to view murder as a situation which most people view as alien to them, in which case “empathy will be in short supply” and the need to address prison conditions or sentencing practices will remain immaterial (The Irish Times, 2008). One author states that the current situation is a “political climate in which there is a pervasive

² See Toch (2007) who presents a compelling argument in relation to the American Criminal Justice System’s treatment of suspected gang members, whereby it is argued that the treatment of gang members can be likened to the treatment of suspected witches in medieval times.

view of the ... serious offender as 'other'... as willful and strong, not warranting lenience, mercy, nor worth trying to understand or help" (Lovegrove, 2007: 771).

It is unlikely that there will be any change to mandatory life sentences for those convicted of murder in this jurisdiction. What may occur, however, is that debate on this issue will become less about the definition of sentence as it will be about the definition of murder and there is likely in the future to be some adjustment to the law with regard to first or second degree murder as is the case in the United States (The Irish Times, 2008).

2.2 Life-Sentence Prisoner Re-Integration.

Re-integration literature discusses the structural difficulties for ex-prisoners in terms of gaining employment and accommodation upon release (Association for Criminal Justice Research and Development (ACJRD), 2002; Eley, 2007; Kurlychek *et al*, 2007; Maguire and Raynor, 2006; National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), 2002; Ruddell and Winfree, 2006). However, what is equally valid in re-integration is the *moral inclusion* of ex-prisoners (Maruna, 2004).

Literature on structural re-integration highlights the difficulties faced by prisoners who have had repeated contact with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and how to prevent them from further crime through adequate training, employment and accommodation. As life-sentence prisoners remain the least likely group of ex-prisoners to re-offend, and for the most part are first time offenders (Bruton, 2004) the debate on re-integration needs to be geared more toward the negative effects of harsh public opinion and moral exclusion.

Maruna (2004) stresses that ex-prisoners have been temporarily banished from society and are returning to an environment of condemnation; the difficulty is how to achieve successful re-integration, the challenge being not least to tackle society's denunciation of the ex-prisoner. Keeping offenders incarcerated for their entire life when they no longer represent a danger to society, is incompatible with the Council of Europe's³ recommendations on crime and further inhibits the role of prisons whose purpose in addition to punishment, is to prepare prisoners for release (ACJRD, 2006; Appleton and Grøver, 2007).

³See also Appleton and Grøver (2007) who, although from a US perspective, present interesting arguments for and against the use of Life without Parole and the implications this sentence has for the prisoner and the institutions holding them.

Educating the public on the benefits of prisoner re-integration poses a serious challenge (ACJRD, 2002; Appleton and Grøver, 2007; Chunn and Menzies, 2006: 671). According to Zedner (2002: 355) “the assumption today is that there is no such thing as an ex-offender... and stigma has become useful again”.

Maruna *et al* (2004) describe *moral contamination*, whereby ex-prisoners face the challenge of the stigma associated with their past. In the context of this study, the social stigma of being a convicted murderer need not be exaggerated. According to Goffman (1963: 3) the stigmatised individual “is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person, to a tainted discounted one”. This label goes beyond believing that the person did something wrong, to there is something wrong with that person (Kurlychek *et al*, 2007).⁴

Maruna and Lebel (2003) discuss a strengths based re-settlement model whereby an ex-prisoner can earn the moral acceptance of the community through their positive contribution to that community. The ex-prisoner earns their place within the community by becoming active within that community (McKeever, 2007) in which case then the ex-prisoner is viewed more as a resource for the community to gain from than “merely liabilities to be supervised” (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 84).⁵ Helping others is regarded as an effective means for the ex-prisoner to develop their self-esteem through learning a sense of responsibility (Burnett and Maruna, 2006) and additionally promotes the development of a “prosocial label” (Maruna *et al*, 2004: 279).

But how does all this impact on the life-sentence prisoner? According to Maruna *et al* (2004), there has been a resurgence of labelling theory which was developed in the 1960s. Labelling theory “...suffered unfair criticism in the 1980’s” (ibid: 273) but is now accepted as holding some weight in the explanation of the disadvantages faced by ex-prisoners. According to Maruna *et al* (2004) the act of labelling an ex-prisoner as such can lead to what is known as secondary deviance, which in turn causes recidivism. However, as life-sentence prisoners are the least likely group of ex-prisoners to re-offend, the effect of this labelling becomes less clear. What is likely to be the outcome for this group is that the effect

⁴ James (2005: 33) provides an interesting illustration of this point where the author states that when a prison teacher noticed the talent he had for writing “It was the first time since my life sentence began that anyone had suggested I might possess a positive quality”.

⁵ See also James (2005) where the author states “all that was achieved by keeping him [a life-sentence prisoner] in [prison] for so long was that society was unnecessarily denied the services of an able contributor” (ibid.:5).

of the label not only colours how society views the individual, but perhaps more importantly, how that person views themselves (Goffman, 1963; Kurlychek *et al*, 2007). In this way, the individual will not achieve to their best potential as they consistently internalise society's limits to their worth and ability.

2.3 Life-Sentence Prisoner Re-integration Practice and Policy in Ireland.

The importance of successful re-integration has long been a concern for Irish scholars, however, there remains limited research on the current situation in this jurisdiction (O'Donnell *et al*, 2007). Two important documents which demonstrated some political commitment to the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners, the Whitaker Report produced in the late 1980's and the NESF (2002) document "The Re-Integration of Prisoners" have since been described as "gather[ing] dust" (O'Keeffe, 2008).

As it currently practised in Ireland, to prepare life-sentence prisoners for release, they are moved through the prison system from secure to less secure conditions as their sentence progresses (Parole Board, 2005). The life-sentence prisoner experiences more time within the free community through going to work and visiting family as their final release date approaches (James, 2005; Maguire *et al*, 1984). Such an approach is similar to what is defined as *reintegrative confinement*, whereby the focus is on preparing prisoners for release through surveillance and linking them back in with the community (Altschuler *et al*, 1999). In Ireland, however, there are limited services to support life-sentence prisoners in the community and what few resources exist for the most part are located in the Dublin area (Parole Board, 2005).

The NESF (2002) identify deinstitutionalisation as an effective means of re-integrating ex-prisoners. Jansyn (1966) suggested that the institutionalising effects of imprisonment are best dealt with through allowing prisoners wear their own clothes and by allowing them work outside of the prison. These practises were recommended by the NESF (2002) and are used in the management of life-sentence prisoners coming up to release in this jurisdiction.

The effective re-integration of life-sentence prisoners also requires that there is continuity between interventions made within the prison and the community and

that release plans are tailored for the individual needs of prisoners (Maguire and Raynor, 2006; NESF, 2002). In addition, the NESF (2002) recommended the involvement of the community and family support agencies to sustain the re-integration of ex-prisoners. It is also recommended that the Irish Prison Service themselves develop systems which may ease the re-integration process, such as improved family visiting facilities and more detailed sentence planning for long term prisoners (NESF, 2002). But, again, it is unclear how far these objectives have been met. The Parole Board (2005) argue that if enacted, the recommendations made by the NESF (2002) would aid the complex task of re-integrating life-sentence prisoners but state that there continues to be a dearth of resources put towards the re-integration of this group of ex-prisoners in the Republic.

CHAPTER 3

3. THE PRISON EXPERIENCE

“The question of whether the experience of long-term imprisonment does any ‘good’ is... more or less irrelevant. From the point of view of the prison authorities... [it] might be ideologically, politically and perhaps even practically, a good solution, but the ‘good’ it is supposed to be doing is for the society that is being protected rather than for the individual prisoner”

Cohen and Taylor (1972: 197)

The following chapter highlights the experience of a life-sentence and the impact this may have on the prisoner. The effect upon family relationships is explored as are the physiological effects of long-term imprisonment. This chapter highlights how life-sentence prisoners emerge from custody weighted down with a number of psycho-social disadvantages.

3.1 Familial disruption/breakdown.

The important role played by the family in prisoner re-integration is well documented (Codd, 2007; NESF, 2002) and is regarded as an important factor in life-sentence prisoners’ coping (Wikberg and Foster, 1990). Long-term imprisonment has a long lasting and profoundly negative impact on family relationships and isolation from loved ones is described as a constant source of emotional pain for prisoners (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002; Rokach, 2000; Sapsford, 1978).

As the years progress, the long term prisoner’s parents have grown old and perhaps died, and as siblings’ lives continue their visiting becomes less frequent (Wikberg and Foster, 1990). For those life-sentence prisoners with wives or girlfriends upon entering custody, research has shown that these relationships have generally broken down by the fifth year of sentence (Sapsford, 1978). Conversely, however, other research found that prisoners without wives or girlfriends on the outside tended to cope better in custody (Crawley and Sparks, 2006: 69).

Although contact with the outside world is viewed as essential for prisoners’ coping (Wikberg and Foster, 1990), some prisoners actually choose to cut off from the outside world. Prisoners report associating a lot of emotional difficulty with being separated from loved ones; as one prisoner stated “prison life is more bearable and easier to cope with if you have nobody to care about beyond the walls”

(Crawley and Sparks, 2006: 69). Prisoners report feeling frustrated by the fact that they had no influence over the lives of the people they cared about on the outside (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002).

3.2 Loss of contact with children.

According to Murray (2007), although distance from the prison to family homes is not always an indicator of whether or not children would visit their incarcerated parent, accessibility does certainly have an impact. For the long-term prisoner, reduced or severed contact with children is also likely to be connected to the breakdown of the relationship with the mother of these children. The IPS (2005) identify some advances in facilities for female prisoners and their children, however, little is indicated in relation to supporting male prisoners access to their children, although it is claimed that visiting facilities have improved.

The NESF (2002) recommend that as many prisoners are parents and are likely to resume that role once they are released, this relationship should be supported whilst in custody. How to sustain this relationship for life-sentence prisoners undoubtedly poses a considerable challenge. There is a great difficulty for long-term prisoners resuming a parental role once they have been released let alone sustaining it whilst they are in prison (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002). This clearly has a negative impact on the children of prisoners,⁶ an analysis of which is beyond the scope of this study.

The damaging effects of severed relationships with their children for life-sentence prisoners cannot be underestimated. This being so for a number of reasons: firstly, active parenting is thought to have a stabilising effect on those in prison (Maruna and LeBel, 2003); and secondly, parenthood has been associated with prisoner rehabilitation (Petersilia, 2001); thirdly, re-integration is thought to be greatly improved through adequately supporting the prisoner's parental role (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002); and finally, more broadly speaking, fatherhood itself is considered an important factor in the male identity, even for those men who are not in prison (Eggebeen and Knoester, 2001).

⁶ See Murray (2007) who presents a thorough analysis of the difficulties faced by the children of prisoners.

3.3 Impact on physical well-being.

The healthcare needs of prisoners are very complex (IPS, 2006). Prisoners' health is considerably worse than that of the general population (Stewart, 2007), with the age of a prisoner approximating the age of someone 10 years older in the free community (Petersilia, 2001). Prisoners are at a high risk of developing STIs but prison services put few resources to tackle this problem (Smith, 2007; Stewart, 2007). It is argued that prisoners are at high risk of developing amongst other things, cancer, heart disease and many infectious diseases (Smith, 2007).

The unhygienic practices of 'slopping out' still occur within some Irish prisons, and widespread overcrowding also jeopardise the health of inmates (O'Keeffe, 2008). So where the National Health Strategy reports an ongoing political commitment to improving the health of prisoners (Department of Health and Children, 2001), and the IPS (2006) assert they are committed to improving prison healthcare, it is still strongly argued that prison medical services remain at a standard much lower than that which is available in the free community (O'Donnell, 2005; O'Keeffe, 2008; O'Mahony, 2000; Smith, 2007) in which case the health of prisoners, particularly those serving long sentences, remains compromised.

3.4 Problems with sexuality.

Consensual and non-consensual sex is part of prison life (Smith, 2007; Stewart, 2007; Goffman, 1961). However, for many prisoners, the experience of *involuntary castration* and the suppression of normal sexual desire is common (Sykes, 1958). Upon release, long-term prisoners express feeling the same age they were when they went in to prison as though they have been developmentally put on ice (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002); this sense could be argued as also likely to have an effect on the men's sexual development. Furthermore, it is stated that prisoners tend not to fully process their experience of prison sex until their release (Smith, 2007), again very likely to have a profound impact upon the prisoner post-release. Whether the prisoner's experience is of involuntary castration, rape or *situational homosexuality* (Stewart, 2007), ex-prisoners report feeling anger and shame and significant problems with intimacy upon their release (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002; Smith, 2007).

3.5 Over-crowding.

Irish prisons are overcrowded and many prisoners are forced to share small cells with other inmates (O’Keeffe, 2008). Overcrowding is argued as negatively impacting upon the psychological well-being of inmates (Huey and McNulty, 2005; IPRT, 2006; O’Mahony, 2000; Rodden, 2007; Stewart, 2007; Wall, 2008). Likewise, overcrowding remains a pivotal factor in suicide (Huey and McNulty, 2005); bullying; and self-harm amongst prisoners (Jewkes and Johnson, 2006). According to Sykes (1958: 4) it is not the solitude which affects the prisoner as much as “life en masse”. The opportunity for solitude denied to many prisoners, is something which many life-sentence prisoners crave (Porporino, 1990).

Overcrowding has led to a reduction in rehabilitative programs within prisons as increasingly prisoners are forced to spend long periods of time in their cells due to a lack of resources (O’Keeffe, 2008; O’Mahony, 2000). Reduced access to rehabilitative programs has resulted in an increased risk of depression and anxiety amongst inmates (Petersilia, 2001). The impact again of long-term exposure to such conditions need not be exaggerated.

CHAPTER 4

4. THE DIRECT CONSEQUENCES OF IMPRISONMENT

“Studies of the effects of institutions and those who are confined in them discuss... the administrative effects of the institution... inmates are rewarded for being well-settled, quiet, resigned and co-operative, and such habits become habitual to the point where the men become too passive to present problems.”

Sapsford (1978: 128)

The following chapter examines the psychological impact of a life-sentence upon the prisoner by exploring the impact of imprisonment on prisoners’ mental health. The issues of authority; identity loss; suicide and institutionalisation are also explored.

4.1 Mental health.

Many authors have argued that the prison environment can compound mental health problems, and even for those prisoners without an existing psychiatric disorder the prison environment causes psychological trauma (Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958; Hamilton, 2007; Huey and McNulty, 2005). These are what Sykes (1958) refers to as the *pains of imprisonment*. Psychiatric care provision in prisons is severely lacking and as a result many prisoners are developing mental health problems which may not have existed prior to incarceration, and for those with a psychiatric diagnosis, the experience has been shown to worsen their condition (Hamilton, 2007; O’Mahony, 2000).

4.2 Authority and control.

Lack of control over their environment is detrimental to prisoners’ mental health (Huey and McNulty, 2005; Hamilton, 2007). Furthermore, the strict regime of the prison (Sykes, 1958); the authoritarian atmosphere (Hamilton, 2007); the unpredictability of the environment (Huey and McNulty, 2005); the lack of interpersonal trust (James, 2005); the inherent threat to personal safety (Goffman, 1961; James, 2005); and the dehumanising effects associated with prison management (Huey and McNulty, 2005) all have a profoundly negative psychological effect on the prisoner.

In response to the danger posed by suicidal and self-harming prisoners, prison authorities use punitive sanctions such as segregation (O’Mahony, 2000). In

so doing however, it is argued that the situation is in fact worsened and furthermore as a result the prisoner can then develop bitterness and anger toward the system and his behaviour becomes even more of a management problem (Toch, 2008).

4.3 Identity loss and personality change.

Identity loss has also been cited as an effect of long-term imprisonment. It is argued that long-term prisoners are effectively cut off from the outside world for a large chunk of their lives and are denied the opportunity of positive self-development (Crawley and Sparks, 2006). In this way, the prisoner is forced into a position whereby they have to construct their new life within the prison walls as their social bonds on the outside have been severed (Harrington and Spohn, 2007). Prisoners can no longer be themselves (Liebling, 2004) and for the long-term prisoner this increases the risk of social introversion as the sentence progresses (Sapsford, 1978).

4.4 Adaptation versus institutionalisation.

Although successful adaptation to prison life is key to preventing prison suicide and psychiatric problems among prisoners (Huey and McNulty, 2005), it has been argued that there is a fine line between adaptation and deterioration (Cohen and Taylor, 1972). Although they are highly vulnerable to this, what many life-sentence prisoners fear most is their own mental deterioration whilst serving their sentence (Cohen and Taylor, 1972). Long-term prisoners can develop apathy and numbness to their surroundings and run a high risk of institutionalisation (Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Jamieson and Grounds, 2002).

For life-sentence prisoners, behaviours which appear to outsiders to be adaptation to prison life are in fact examples of deterioration within it (Cohen and Taylor, 1972). According to Sapsford (1978: 128), the long-term effect of rewarding inmates for being “well-settled, quiet, resigned and co-operative” is damaging to the point where the prisoner becomes too passive to cause problems. One author made the following statement with regard to life-sentence prisoners: “Lifers [life-sentence prisoners] are an unusual lot. They are different from other inmates, and if given the choice, I’d prefer a prison population composed solely of

lifers... they are generally the best behaved inmates... because they age within the rigorous control of a prison” (Bruton, 2004: 157).

But because of the relatively compliant nature of this prisoner group these problems are often overlooked (Crawley and Sparks, 2006; James, 2005). Institutionalisation can equally result from enforced idleness; loss of responsibility; loss of contact with the outside world; and loss of prospects outside of the prison (Liebling and Maruna, 2005). And again, simply not enough attention has been paid to the enduring psychological effects of institutionalisation for life-sentence prisoners post-release (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002).

CHAPTER 5

5. COPING WITH IMPRISONMENT

“...deeper aspects of the impact of imprisonment should be explored in order to identify ways in which ex-prisoners... may be better able to cope with release and the experience of the past.”

Jamieson and Grounds (2002: 1.1)

Having established that prison life is a challenging experience for the life-sentence prisoner, this chapter goes on to explore how prisoners cope with this. This chapter aims to provide a brief summary of what methods of coping are employed by prisoners and to present the reader with an understanding of how the methods employed impact upon the prisoner.

5.1 Overview.

One of the primary difficulties for the long-term prisoner is that they are forced to accept that one part of their life has been closed off and are required to construct a new life within the prison (Cohen and Taylor, 1972). In so doing, they need to adapt to prison life and develop new ways of coping within an environment of enforced social interaction and surveillance (Liebling, 2004). Notwithstanding, it must be remembered that life-sentence prisoners are not an homogenous group and how they cope varies enormously (Porporino, 1990; Mitchell, 1992). Some prisoners may purposely withdraw - withdrawal from both prison life and the outside world (Porporino, 1990); some may draw from previous experiences of care homes as children or induction within the army (Crawley and Sparks, 2006); whereas others may become immersed in their hobbies, such as reading, writing or painting (Cohen and Taylor, 1972).

5.2 Work and Training.

Research by Batchelder and Pippert (2002) found that prison officers view work as the most effective means of coping for prisoners, although Cohen and Taylor (1972) argue that due to the mundane nature of prison employment, only a small percentage of life-sentence prisoners cite work as something positive. Notwithstanding, prison work and training schemes would have witnessed some improvement since Cohen and Taylor's study, and could be regarded as an effective means for prisoners to cope in custody.

5.3 The Role of Gang Membership and Religion.

Gang affiliation is used as a means of coping with the stresses of prison life (Thomas and Zaitzow, 2006). Gang affiliation can fuel some prisoners' use of aggressive behaviour and defiance as a means of coping with the fear of submitting to prison authority and subsequent deterioration (Boyle, 1977; Thomas and Zaitzow, 2006). Irish prisons increasingly report difficulties with managing gang-related disputes, which is a relatively new development for prisons in this jurisdiction (O'Keeffe, 2008). However for life-sentence prisoners, gang membership or violence rarely lasts throughout the sentence (Crawley and Sparks, 2006).

Some inmates will turn to religion and spirituality as a means of coping (Thomas and Zaitzow, 2006). In this way, the group membership and safety similar to that which is provided by gang affiliation is satisfied, but in addition to this the prisoner gains some sense of inner-peace and a more positive outlook in terms of their future within the prison and eventually outside of it (Thomas and Zaitzow, 2006). Life-sentence prisoners may also turn to religion as a means of coming to terms with their crime (Cohen and Taylor, 1978).

5.4 Self-Harming Behaviour.

Self-harming behaviour is very high amongst the prison population, particularly at the beginning of the sentence (Jeglic *et al*, 2005). The beginning of a prison sentence has been described as *entry shock* (Crawley and Sparks, 2006). Self-harming behaviour within prisons not only occurs as a result of depression and difficulty adapting with the environment but is also used by prisoners as a means of problem solving, whereby prisoners may do this in order to, for example, be moved to another wing or prison (Jeglic *et al*, 2005). However, the use of self-harm is indicative of the prisoner's lack of alternative coping mechanisms (*ibid.*). Prison programs which provide prisoners with the opportunity of peer counselling and support can help prisoners learn new ways of coping (Thomas and Zaitzow, 2006).

5.5 Sleeping and Drug Use.

Spending large amounts of time sleeping is another method of coping for prisoners, this being particularly so in cases where prisoners are kept locked up for long

periods (Toch, 2008). This boredom and isolation effect can also induce drug use (Crewe, 2006). This being a risk particularly for life-sentence prisoners beginning their sentence, due to widespread drug use within Irish prisons in recent years (Brady, 2008).

5.6 Coping with Release.

The psychological effect of living within the prison environment and the methods with which long-term prisoners use to cope with it poses a considerable challenge to them upon their release (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002). So much so, that long-term prisoners will often resort to using the supports of other ex-prisoners over that which is provided by their family upon their release (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002). The feeling for these ex-prisoners being that it is only another who has been through it can actually understand what it is like to serve a life-sentence (ibid).

CHAPTER 6

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research methods chosen for this paper and the rationale behind that choice. The process of deciding upon a participant group will be outlined. This chapter will also examine how the researcher's initial research questions informed the decision on the chosen methodology. The processes of accessing and interviewing participants will also be looked at and finally, ethical considerations impacting upon this research will be explored.

6.1 Participant Group.

The participant group were male life-sentence prisoners released on-licence for a minimum of one year into the community. These men had been convicted of murder as adults. The decision on the chosen participant group was informed by the researcher's recognition that life sentence prisoners are not a homogenous group (Mitchell, 1992), and qualified this choice through the following guidelines:

- Although many of the issues faced by long-term imprisonment may be similar regardless of conviction, the focus in this study was on life-sentence prisoners convicted of murder and the specific challenges faced by this group.
- In spite of a possibility of some cross-gender comparison, the focus of this research paper was on male life-sentence prisoners. This researcher recognises that men and women respond differently to imprisonment and due to different social roles to their male counterparts, women may also have different resettlement experiences (Heidensohn, 2002).
- Additionally, this research concentrated on men convicted of murder as adults (over 18 years of age upon conviction). It was recognised by this researcher that issues relating to prisoners who were convicted of murder as children would require a more specific attention in terms of both sentencing (Sanders and Young, 2007) and their prison experience (Muncie, 2002).
- Finally, the treatment and reintegration of prisoners whose crimes are sex related is also likely to require unique attention. This researcher recognises that there are undoubtedly issues and challenges which are unique to this group of offenders (McAlinden, 2006; Murphy, 2002) and chose to focus this research on offenders whose conviction was not sex-related.

6.2 The Relevance of the Crime.

This research sought to examine the experience of life-sentence imprisonment and how this experience impacts upon the prisoner post-release. The purpose of the research was not to examine the participant's crime. However, the researcher did acknowledge the murder conviction with its possible relevance to the prison experience for the life-sentence prisoner and its impact on feelings of guilt or negative societal and familial attitudes towards the offender.

6.3 The Role of Research Questions.

The purpose of this research was not to highlight issues for life-sentence prisoners from the outside looking in, but to draw these out from those who have experienced it. In this way, the design of this research evolved from a commitment to valuing the opinion of those who had served a life-sentence and their thoughts on its psycho-social impact; how they coped; what support they received; and what they would recommend for life-sentence prisoners in the future. In this way, this researcher adopted a phenomenological approach to the study (Wilson, 2002). The purpose being to draw out the participant's own narrative (*ibid.*) as the meaning and experience drawn from a life-sentence will vary between individuals. A phenomenological approach fails to lend itself to hypothesis testing (*ibid.*) and so this researcher chose instead to ask research questions, seeking simply to answer these and not to prove a hypothesis right or wrong.

6.4 Research Design.

A qualitative research design was chosen for this piece of research for the following reasons:

- The most common research design for a phenomenological approach is qualitative (Wilson, 2002). Having posed the research questions and then exploring potential issues for the life-sentence prisoner through a thorough review of the available literature, this researcher interviewed released life-sentence prisoners for their experience.
- The research questions posed by this researcher did not lend themselves well to quantifiable analysis and required that the research data be rich in

experiential meaning. Such meaning could be gleaned from only qualitative methods.

- Qualitative research designs are an important tool in criminology (Maxfield and Babbie, 2001; Meuser and Löschper, 2002). The benefit of qualitative methods is its ability to extract richness and meaning from the data (Maxfield and Babbie, 2001). For the purpose of this research, where the intention from the outset was to extract meaningful experiential data from life-sentence prisoners, this researcher adopted qualitative methods through an awareness of the risk of losing some of the meaning associated with life-sentence imprisonment by trying to quantify personal narratives.
- Historically, criminological research with ex-prisoners which examines the experience of long-term incarceration and its impact post-release have used qualitative methods (Codd, 2007; Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Crawley, 2006; Jamieson and Grounds, 2002). Qualitative data allows for a more in-depth analysis.
- The benefits of surveys and other quantifiable research methods, although some of the richness of meaning may be lost, is that information can be gleaned from a very large number of people (May, 2004). In the context of this piece of research due to time and budget constraints and issues with gaining access to the participant group, qualitative methods were adopted because then a large amount of information could be gleaned from a small sample group (May, 2004).

6.5 Research Methods.

6.5.1 Sampling, Access and Gatekeepers.

Participants were originally to be accessed at random through the Probation Service, however there did arise some issues with access and therefore more flexibility was required from the researcher. According to Patenaude (2004: 70S) flexibility is a vital for the qualitative researcher as they are consistently required to “make do with whatever is at hand”. In the case of this research, the researcher employed snowball sampling for 2 of the participants. Snowball sampling is used most commonly with specialised interviews (Maxfield and Babbie, 2006) or when the participant group is widely distributed (May, 2004). This researcher began by

identifying through one Probation Officer one participant who then himself identified another life-sentence prisoner who would be willing to participate.

In terms of access, there emerged an unexpected discrepancy between Probation Officers' willingness as gatekeepers to allow the researcher's access to life-sentence prisoners. In which case this researcher was forced to choose other means of accessing the participant group and utilise the assistance of more willing gatekeepers – in the case of this research, the manager of a community based residential unit which supports life-sentence prisoners upon their release.

The researcher wrote to this manager with information about the research at hand (Appendix C). The researcher was subsequently granted permission to interview the life-sentence prisoners within this unit. Access is granted by gatekeepers, according to Patenaude (2004), based on whether they consider there to be value in the piece of research – in the case of this study, the said manager perceived value in the research endeavour and was willing to grant access to the researcher.

6.5.2 Interviews.

A semi-structured interview (Appendix A) with 5 life-sentence prisoners was employed. The researcher acted on the advice of their supervisor who suggested that 5 in-depth interviews lasting for approximately 1 hour should provide enough information for analysis. By being semi-structured, the interviews allowed for some comparison between responses (May, 2004).

The researcher designed the interview with *probes* and *invitations* (May, 2004) which allowed the researcher gain expansion on a point made by the participant but which also provided enough freedom for the participant to explain their story openly. Some closed questions were included which provided some quantifiable information such as age; age at sentencing; age upon release; year of release; journey through prison system; and whether or not they had been in prison before. The purpose of these closed questions was to provide for some cross-comparison however, to gain any significant statistical results from such questions a much larger sample would be required (May, 2004).

6.5.3 Data Collection.

With signed consent from the participants (Appendix B), the interviews were recorded onto digital audio recording equipment. As is common with recorded interviews in social research (May, 2004) a few minutes into the interview, the participant was unaware of the recording equipment. These interviews were then transcribed for analysis (Appendix D) and the audio recording destroyed. Interview transcription being the most lengthy part of the process (May, 2004) as the one hour interviews took between eight and nine hours each to transcribe. Interviews were conducted in one of two places, the choice being the participant's – a room in a Probation Service office lent to the researcher for the purpose of the study or a room in the residential unit allowed by the manager for the researcher.

Patenaude (2004) highlights the importance of rapport building when it comes to qualitative data collection. It is argued that effective rapport building provides the means for collecting rich and useful data (ibid.). This researcher was equally required to make the participants feel at ease and in an environment where they felt it was safe to talk; in this way the researcher was required firstly to provide a non-judgemental environment and secondly by making the participants feel as though they had something worthwhile to contribute. Likewise, it was equally important that the researcher develop their own legitimacy as this too helps when meeting participants, the participant needs to feel like the researcher is someone worth talking to (Patenaude, 2004).

6.5.4 Data Analysis.

The semi-structured interview design allowed for comparison between responses (May, 2004). However, according to Patenaude (2004), the challenge with qualitative research is for the researcher to adopt an analytical framework which minimises the possibility of bias. Responses to open ended questions were coded (ibid.) into groups or themes to provide for analysis. For example, *feelings upon entering prison environment*. Patterns in perception were also sought, for example, *perception of prison staff*. As with Jamieson and Grounds' (2002) study, difficulties expressed by participants were grouped into themes, for example, *family contact*. The presentation of data by Jamieson and Grounds (2002) was used as a template for the presentation of the data in this research.

6.6 Ethical Considerations.

As noted by Patenaude (2004: 73S) “research ethics are concerned with the notions of harm, consent, privacy, and the confidentiality of the data/participants”. With this in mind this researcher made the following safeguards:

- Voluntary participation is vital in criminological research (Maxfield and Babbie, 2006). The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any stage and that their non-participation would not result in any negative consequences (Appendix B). It is noteworthy here, to highlight Maxfield and Babbie’s (2006) observation who argue that where voluntary participation is important, the consequence is that due to the very nature of the issues being researched within criminology generalizability will be threatened due to the fact that the data collected is from respondents who are willing to participate. In the case of this study, one participant withdrew at a late stage for their own reasons and how their data could have influenced the data already collected remains unknown. Notwithstanding, due to the small scale of this piece of research, the intension was never for generalizability and was more geared toward gaining a better picture of the experience of life-sentence imprisonment from any life-sentence prisoner willing to share their story.
- Participants consent was informed – they were provided with an explanation of the researcher’s intended study; what their own contribution would be; what would happen to the information they provide; and again that their participation was voluntary (Appendix B).
- Participants were informed that their anonymity would be maintained through name changes in the data; the destruction of any audio material; and the non-disclosure of the location of the respondent, for example, the address of the residential unit. The participants were informed that their contribution would be used for research purposes only and would not be passed onto a third party, for example, the police, their Probation Officer, nor to other participants. The requirement for this being particularly important for life-sentence prisoners as their situation remains very much at the discretion of the Department of Justice and participants would be

unwilling to speak to anyone who was going to have any power in compromising their freedom.

- According to Maxfield and Babbie (2006), the fundamental ethical dilemma for all social research is the balancing of the potential benefits of the research being conducted with the possibility of harm to those being studied. Confidentiality was one method of reducing harm to this particular participant group, however, the topic under discussion also required additional safeguards. In order to cultivate un-biased data, the researcher was required to make clear to the participant that the researcher was not acting as a counsellor and although rapport was important the researcher was not to foster a therapeutic relationship with the participant (Jamieson and Grounds, 2002). In this way, the researcher needed to redirect the participant if it was felt that the participant was seeking advice. The researcher was also required to change tack, pause or finish the interview if it was felt that the participant was in any way suffering. This researcher chose participants who had been released for a minimum of 12 months prior to interview; this was also an attempt at safeguarding against harm to participants as they were talking retrospectively about their experience and were not in the middle of what they were required to relay.
- One final consideration was one which concerned the researcher themselves. In order to maintain objective and un-biased the researcher was required to be aware of their questioning technique and how they were coming across to participants. When conducting research with criminal groups, the researcher is vulnerable to the risk of whitewashing and taking the side of those being researched (Meuser and Löschper, 2002) in this respect this researcher had to be self-aware of their own risk of this. Although the purpose of this study was not to examine the crimes which had led to the life-sentence, the researcher needed to be aware that the participants were not a complete victim of circumstance and that their situation was caused by their own actions. This study was never about the abolition of life-sentences and this researcher needed to maintain that starting point when meeting with the participants.

CHAPTER 7

7. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the reader with the data. Primarily, a profile of the participants' is presented. Following on from this, the chapter breaks down the data thematically by examining the participants' views on their prison experience in terms of entry shock; adapting to prison life; the prison environment; coping with prison and deterioration; family relationships; effects of imprisonment; and their own recommendations for the treatment of life-sentence prisoners.

7.1 Participant Profile.

All participants were men sentenced to life as adults; the men were white, Irish Catholics. At the time of interview the participants had been released on-license for an average of 3.25years (range 12months-5years) whose mean age was 46years old (range 42-55years). The men had served a mean time of just over 17years in custody (range 15.8years-18.5years). They were aged on average 26years old at sentencing (range 22-34years) and aged 43years (range 40-50years) upon release. None of the participants reported having served any prison time prior to their life-sentence nor any previous convictions. Of the four participants, one was in full-time employment, one was unemployed, and two were on community employment (CE) schemes.

7.2 Entry Shock.

The participants reported a sense of shock upon first entering the prison at the beginning of their sentence.

"A big shock... you had people telling you what to do and you lost your freedom"

"I got depressed from the fright"

"First impressions is [sic] very frightening... sort of takes the guts out of you"

"The first night was a nightmare, I didn't sleep at all"

Furthermore, the participants each reported that there was a period of time which elapsed before they came to terms with their circumstance and settled in to their sentence – generally this period of time was about 2-3years.

“...having to adjust... it took me 2years to get any understanding whatsoever about it [my circumstances]”

“...it [the beginning] was the worst part... but once you get settled down then that’s it”

“...it took me, I remember three years into my sentence”

For one of the participants, however, the gravity of their situation did not hit them until much later into their sentence:

“...around the middle [of my sentence]. After about 7years... I could feel the walls closing in on top of me in my cell”

This sense of shock was so frightening that it caused extreme emotional responses:

“It was hard for the first 2years yeah. I didn’t think I was going to make it at that time. I thought the pressure was going to get to me. Big time. I really believed that yeah”

“I was in there [prison] 2 nights and I wanted to hang myself you know”

7.3 Loss.

There was a common theme of loss for the participants upon entering custody. The men spoke of a sense that much had been taken from them – family; friends; women; liberty; control; identity – and the difficulty they faced coming to terms with that, was what fuelled their initial shock upon entry.

“When you are locked up everything is gone, everything was taken away... missed your family, missed your friends, missed your few pints, missed your woman”

“Because everything is taken away from you you don’t have any control”

“Your liberty has been stripped off you you know”

“You don’t have choices you’re a prisoner... you’re a number and that’s all you are a number”

“I suppose the hardest part is being locked away”

7.4 Adapting to Prison Life.

Following on from the shock of entering the prison environment, each of the participants spoke about how they adapted to prison life. Accepting their situation was, according to the respondents, paramount:

“There’s nothing I can do with it [the sentence], I can’t change it... so I just accepted, survived, and then you start getting on with it”

“...you can either suck it up and get on with your life, or you can go off the head”

“...concentrating on what you have to do on the inside”

“...get focussed and make the best of a bad situation. That’s what you have to do”

“My life was in prison and I accepted that. So I just got on with it”

Part of the adaptation to prison life required that the prisoner forget about the world they left outside:

“You see you have to forget about the outside... you have to completely blank that off and just get on with your time”

“...I just blanked it [the outside] out of me [sic] head altogether”

The prisoner was also required to accept that they are alone within the prison environment, in spite of being surrounded by people, your sentence is essentially your own and only you are going to be able to get yourself through it.

“...when you walk into prison you have to do all things for yourself”

“I think life-sentence prisoners go their own route you know... they go into their own inner feelings and they deal with what they are going to deal with”

“...you were still on your own, no matter what... the guy beside you who was doing life as well maybe, he was dealing with his own issues in life”

“Prison is about yourself... you do your time on your own. Nobody’s going to do it for you”

7.5 The Prison Environment.

The environment was viewed by the prisoners as generally a very negative place, in the words of one of the men:

“It is a scary environment. Because something can happen at the click of a finger. You don’t know what’s going to happen, what’s going to go down. It’s violent, it’s anger, it’s drugs... it’s a dark place, it’s full of pain”

7.5.1 Routine.

The participants spoke of the prison routine and the need to adapt to this. The sense of repetition stands out quite clearly from their comments:

“You get up in morning 8 o’clock, you get your breakfast, and then you’re banged up until about 9:30, and then you’re in the yard, you can go to the work shops you can go to the gym or go to school and then you get your dinner at 12 o’clock. And then you’re banged up then until 2:30pm. And then you can do the same again you can go to the workshops or the gym or whatever and then you get your tea at 4pm. And then you’re banged up until 5:30 and that’s your recreation from half five to half seven. You can play pool or go to the gym or play football or sit in the yard. And then you’re banged up at half seven for the night.”

“every day inside the same, you get unlocked, you get locked up. Nothing changes. You know, the seasons pass, the holidays pass, whatever, but there’s still the same thing inside every day”

This regime is what led to the sense of loss of choice and control over their environment:

“...you don’t have any control, you’re told what time to get up in the morning, you’re told what time to go to the toilet; you’re told what time to have your meals at”

“The whole day is planned out for you”

7.5.2 Relating to other Prisoners.

The data provides rich insight into the dynamics between prisoners from the perspective of the life-sentence prisoner. The close living conditions caused unease amongst the prisoners; according to one participant:

“... if someone gets a bad visit or a bad letter, and they’ll come and take it out on somebody... like you can feel the tension, you know when the tension is there”

The prison environment, naturally, also brought with it an ever changing supply of other prisoners. One participant explained how he managed to shut this part of prison life out:

“You noticed it [other prisoners coming and going] but after a while you don’t take any heed of it, you managed to ignore it”

Another commented that this ever changing prison population was what led to his wanting to be in a single cell:

"...you know you'd just go insane if you were in a double room, because what would happen is if you were getting fellas in with you, and they were changing every six or seven months or something, you know, it'd just be head wrecking, they're going out and you're still there"

The participants spoke frankly about the annoyance of prisoners doing short sentences:

"I usually mixed with lifers... keep away from the guys doing a month or two"

"...I wasn't able to mix with fellas going around crying over doing two or three months looking for weekends out"

"...I hung around people who's doing life sentences or people who was doing 10 or 12 years or something. Because we was all going nowhere. And if you get people coming in doing 6months they'd be wining in your ear Oh I'm doing 6 months it's wrecking me head"

There was a sense amongst the participants that life-sentence prisoners had an understanding of each other and what they were going through, whether or not they discussed this with one another. This tendency for life-sentence prisoners to group together had its benefits:

"I didn't want to listen to that [prisoners complaining about short sentences]. I would just say go on and do your feckin [sic] time then, your feckin 6months then, I'm doing a bleeding life sentence and I don't know when I'm getting fucking out. Are you? Are you? They nearly died"

"You had status as a lifer"

"...You don't have to worry about someone, somebody coming up to you all the time. As a lifer there's a fear about you from other prisoners"

In terms of arguments with other prisoners, it seemed clear that in general life-sentence prisoners preferred to behave themselves than run the risk of impeding their exit from the prison, however far ahead that may be:

"There were a few altercations, you can't go through 16years of jail and not run into someone when you're having a bad day or he's having a bad day or something but never any digging matches or anything. I was very lucky in that... I was never put on report"

"Believe it or not, the only arguments I had was playing hand ball with the travelers"

“You always get rows amongst prisoners, but it would only be mouth talk there wouldn’t be fists or anything... when a fella is doing life, they don’t like to get into rows because if they get into one, they know they are going to hold them back for a few years”

“And when you come up for a parole hearing it’s [fighting] all written down”

However, there was a discrepancy amongst the participants’ view of friendships within prison. One commented that where some prisoners do group together, this did not necessarily mean that they were friends with each other:

“You won’t have friendships as such; you had guys you got on with and you hung around with”

While another was adamant about his positive experience of prison friendships:

“I made better friends in prison [than in free community]. Your best friends are in prison”

Notwithstanding, even where prisoners are friends, the sense of isolation persists:

“But inside like, you make friends, but a lot of the time you’re actually on your own. Even when you’re with friends... prison is about yourself... you do your time on your own”

“I would be nice and say hello and all but basically just kept to myself”

“Prison is about loneliness, you’re very lonely even if you’re locked up with a hundred, two hundred fellas”

In terms of life-sentence prisoners relating to other prisoners, one participant made an interesting observation by pointing out how life-sentence prisoners differ the general prison population:

“As I said I just stuck with the lifers and the country lads because all the Dubs talk about drugs or they say they done this job and done that job... I don’t want to listen to all that. And when you’re hanging around lifers that’s only in on a once off they don’t talk about crime. Because they were never involved in crime”

7.5.3 Lack of Privacy.

The men spoke about a feeling watched within the prison environment and a constant awareness of being under surveillance:

"You are being watched the whole time yeah"

Likewise, overcrowding within the prison was an issue for the men, enhancing further the feeling of a loss of privacy:

"...it was very overcrowded...you wouldn't have much privacy, you could be in a three man cell or a four man cell..."

The men were quite certain of the benefits of having a cell to themselves:

"when I went to [name of prison] I got my own single cell... and I enjoyed it"

"I wouldn't actually share because I couldn't handle sharing, I needed my own space"

"...over the years I might have taken somebody in for a couple of weeks if they'd no space, but after a couple of weeks I'd want them out of there because I'd be crawling the walls... I liked my own privacy when the door was locked, because I was behind the door and I was doing my own thing and I could relax, listen to my music, read my books. And this was before televisions came into prisons"

However, one of the men used a story to illustrate the perils of leaving a man in a cell by himself:

"Like I remember I was in there for 3 years and there was a lifer on [prison landing] and he was suicidal and they doubled him up for a couple of weeks and he was in with the psychiatrist and says I've had enough I want to go back to a single cell and he got his single cell and he hung himself that night in the cell. He had only served about 3 or 4 year"

7.5.4 Prison Officers.

There was a general feeling of a lack of trust of prison staff:

"I wouldn't ask any of them to do me a favour... I wouldn't trust them"

However, the men were acutely aware as life-sentence prisoners, of the need to behave themselves in front of prison staff, as one participant put it:

"...you're being watched... That sense is there all the time... it's like they [prison officers] say jump and you say how high. Giving them back cheek or anything like that it's a black mark it is. And then when you come up for a parole hearing it's all written down, you're looking for something, do you not remember back in 19 so and so and so, the cheek you gave the officer you see. In other words, there's a difference between a prisoner who has a release date and a life-sentence prisoner, he doesn't have a release date... You have to earn your release"

The loss of identity, lack of support and the sense of being alone felt by the men were also mainly attributed to the attitude of prison officers:

“The officers hardly look at you, you are only a number”

“...you have to deal with your own time... because the prison officers ain’t going to do it for you”

And the officers were viewed as being unskilled in their work:

“Nobody ever came to me and sat me down and says lookit you’re doing a life-sentence and this is how it works”

“...there’s never going to be any help within the prisons because you are only a number and that’s it... they [prison officers] are not qualified”

Notwithstanding, the men reported that some officers would do good deeds for the prisoners:

“The odd old officer used to bring in a bottle of spirits”

“Well I remember one year I won’t mention his name now, I had fifty Euro in my pocket right and I said to him any chance of getting a bottle of vodka for New Year’s Eve, well he says are you going into the yard or are you staying in your cell, I says I’m staying in my cell. He says well give me that forty Euro, and the bottle probably cost only about 18 Euro but I let him keep the fucking forty Euro and that was it. So I called down me mate on New Years”

In general though, the view of the prison staff remained fairly negative for each of the participants, the consensus being that you keep out of their way and they will keep out of yours. The men did suggest though that officers with whom a prisoner got on well were a helpful commodity. As one participant explained:

“But the ones [prisoners] he liked if they came up with alcohol [urinalysis] he just tear it up and throw it in the shredder, and that’s the end then”

Another explained how he would get extra time with his family:

“... most of the officers used to look after me because I used to scratch their backs and they used to scratch my back”

7.6 Coping with Prison Life.

It is not the purpose of this summary of the data to provide a detailed account of what the men said about prison coping; indeed, in order to give due justice to the detailed and rich perspective on coping offered by the participants, an entirely separate study would be required. This section will provide an account of the common themes identified in the data and present some of the very important comments made by the participants on the subject of coping.

7.6.1 Drug Use.

All the men admitted to some drug use whilst in prison, however, they all also claimed that their drug use was not a major feature of their time in prison and that they did not get involved in any drugs other than alcohol and cannabis. As one participant commented:

“...they [life-sentence prisoners] know they have too much to lose you know... If they went down the road of hard drugs that would be too much of an addiction to kick”

7.6.2 Keeping Busy.

All the men spoke about either going into school or work very early on into their sentence and throughout their time in prison. The consensus being that if they were going to cope within that environment for that length of time, they would need to keep busy:

“... to keep you mind occupied because if you are out sitting in the yard, just out on the yard all day you have too much time to think and your head would be wrecked”

All the men claimed that the decision to do this was based on the advice of other life-sentence prisoners who offered this up as an important tool for surviving their sentence. By keeping busy, a prisoner can more easily forget about the world they left outside. Likewise, the men also highlighted the importance of making something of their sentence that for them it was not enough to do nothing until they were released, and gaining an education was one means of making the time worthwhile:

“I made a choice, a conscious choice, that I wasn’t going to lie around all my sentence, I wanted to get something out of it”

7.6.3 Other Methods of Coping.

HUMOUR

One of the men spoke about how life-sentence prisoners develop a kind of black humour as a way of coming to terms with their situation and coping with the darker aspects of prison life. According to this man, life-sentence prisoners refer to each other as “*L-Plates*” and the term “*the bed-sheet express*” is used when referring to prison suicide because “*a lot of people use bed-sheets to hang themselves*”.

RELIGION

One of the men also spoke about having found faith in prison and the way this helped him to come to terms with his past and his situation. Although he refers to this as “*the old famous cliché*” he still regarded it as an important tool in coping with prison.

KEEPING FIT

Two of the participants also spoke about physical fitness and how this too helped pass the time. Both the gym and yoga were made available to prisoners and two of the men spoke about how they enjoyed this in terms of both relaxation and keeping healthy:

“I was feeling healthy. I could do the splits and all. I done yoga in the Training Unit for 12 months. I could do the crab stand”

7.6.4 Prisoners Coping Differently.

An important observation made by the men was the differences between people and how they coped. One participant pointed out that life-sentence prisoners are no different from anyone else in that people cope with things differently in all walks of life, not just in prison.

One man spoke about how he witnessed other prisoners who in the free community would have a very strong image, but once they get inside prison, they cannot cope:

“Like there’s all the hardened criminals all the gangland they go to jail and they can’t do it. They are not able to do time. All of a sudden they are in a room six foot by 12 being locked up 19 hours a day and they can’t cope with it. Even they break down crying. What are supposed to be hard men crying in their cell and on sleeping tablets at night... like if you see people on the outside and if they have an image as a hard man right, they bring that into the prison, a hard man. But when

they go behind the door when they are locked up that's different. They can't do the time, but when they come out onto the landings they have to live up to their name...It's a front"

7.6.5 Coping Because You Have To.

All the men spoke about coping with prison life as a matter of having to – it is either a case of coping and getting on with your sentence or suicide. As one participant commented:

"[it's] a humdinger of a sentence, life, it's a humdinger. But, erm, they say only the strong survive you know what I mean? It's about being strong and it's about will-power, it's about discipline"

For all the men, having witnessed deterioration in other prisoners was what made them think that they did not want to serve their sentence the same way – a stark reminder of their precarious situation. One of the participants paints a very clear picture of the processes involved for the life-sentence prisoner who witnesses other prisoner's deterioration, which demonstrates quite clearly the feelings portrayed by the men interviewed and their need to survive:

"...I seen people go... actually going insane and that was because they weren't doing anything with themselves. They were walking around the yard for two hours in the morning, two hours in the afternoon, day in day out – that can't be good for you, your inner soul you know... Yep I seen prisoners deteriorate, I seen people commit suicide in prison... [They] couldn't cope no. Didn't get, didn't plan their day, didn't plan their week or... just let it saunter on, just got into them and just couldn't cope. I seen people turn to drugs who thought that was the answer to it... It's a wake up call, yeah. To get focussed and make the best of a bad situation. That's what you have to do"

7.7 Family Contact.

All of the men spoke about the important role played by family visits during their sentence. Some of the men became visibly upset when asked about their family contact during their sentence. Another man spoke about the guilt he felt around his family and the impact his sentence would have had on them:

"... you realise our family does actually have a lot harder time than you, hey have to walk in and see you and then walk away from you and leave you behind the walls, you know... and they have to deal with the stuff that you've left outside. They have to deal with your crime and the impact on their lives... you're cocooned inside of the prison as well, you're locked away from everything. And you don't realise what they had to go through as well. Not just, you're not the only one that got punished for your crime, but your family, got by, just by association, they got punished as well... you kind of think of the pain that you've caused them as well"

There was a difference between how the men viewed hearing news from their visitors. Whereas one participant enjoyed hearing about what was happening on the outside:

“...then we would start talking about how they’re doing and that used to suit me great”

Another participant found hearing about the outside actually frustrating:

“...I can’t deal with any issues on the outside, I’m locked away behind walls”

Due to the mundane and negative nature of prison life, a common problem for the men was their sense of having nothing to contribute to conversation with family members on visits:

“Ah, ‘yeah I got up this morning, I emptied my pisspot, went back in’ – it’s the same thing, it doesn’t change”

“...‘what are you doing today?’ ‘same thing I was doing yesterday, same thing I was doing yesterday as last year’. It doesn’t change, it’s just repetitive, repeating repeating repeating repeating”

For one of the men, a solution to this was having a variety of family members coming to visit him which meant he did not have the same person visiting each time. For this man he felt in this way they would be more likely to have things to talk about. Another participant’s solution to the problem was to reduce family visits altogether because he found there was nothing to talk about.

The men also spoke about what it was like for them when they were released and rebuilding a relationship with their family after having seen them only within the prison for a long time. As one participant put it:

“...I was still nervous... [about] Getting to know them again. And to trust them. And probably they are learning to be around me aswell... they hadn’t seen me. They had only seen me for once a week for an hour that was it”

Two of the participants had children when they were sentenced. One man chose to have his children cut out of his life altogether as he did not want to have them growing up with a father behind bars. The other participant would have preferred that, but his daughter was much older and made the decision to visit him herself and he had little choice over the matter:

“I didn’t like her coming up when she was in school you know. I didn’t want her coming up but she wanted to do it. I didn’t want her coming up so young you know.”

And to face all that and to grow up in that. Because I was afraid that if her friends in school were talking about why I was in jail and started name calling. Bullying her you know. I know she can stand up for herself, she's very strong willed person but I didn't want her to go down that road. But what could I do? She wanted to come up and what could I say... She maintained that [the visits] all the way through to the day I got released"

7.8 Resettlement Experiences.

7.8.1 Temporary Release.

The participants spoke frankly about their resettlement experiences. Each of the men would have experienced some form of Temporary Release (TR) building up to their full release; they describe their feelings of being in free community as being both a positive and a negative:

"...my first TR out was ten years, after ten years and that was a shock to the system – colours, sounds, smells, mobile phones... I was walking up Grafton Street with a friend, and I just said 'look, get me off the street', I couldn't handle it"

"The first time ever was with a priest. It was mad, I couldn't believe it... [it was] A great feeling yeah. But strange at the same time"

"... The first few weeks [of TR] used to tear lumps out of me"

7.8.2 Traffic.

All of the men speak about the difficulties they experienced getting used to traffic:

"Cars... I hadn't seen cars in years you know. Buses"

"... I couldn't judge the cars as I was crossing the road... for the first time in eight years I seen cars come speeding up and down"

"Even to walk across the road I wouldn't even look up and down I would just keep going... I wouldn't even bother to look up and down... Because they are things you would never do when you were inside"

7.8.3 Getting Used to the Free Community.

The volume of people and the speed of life on the outside are common themes in the data.

"The numbers of people, the noise... and the everything"

"I wasn't able to cope. People were running they weren't walking"

There were difficulties with going into shops after so long without being able to do these things. Handling money was a problem for one of the men; another found the shop security systems difficult to get used to:

“I used to be nervous going into town and I used to be nervous going into shops because I didn’t know the money at all. I didn’t know how much for anything”

“The metal detectors in the shop because they had metal detectors in the Training Unit and I had to walk through them 2 or 3 times a day. I wouldn’t have anything on me now or anything, but coming up to it I could feel my face going red and I would be saying to myself I feel this is going to go off and the security guards going to dive me. But I said I haven’t anything on me, but god I would just leg it up the road”

One man spoke about how his language had been coloured by his years in prison, that he had developed a prison lingo which he needed to adjust; he felt it was important for him to be careful what he was saying so as not to expose where he was from.

“... you’re meeting people who don’t know where you’re from, you’re watching your language”

There was also a real sense of being out of touch with the outside world:

“...I mean culture changes, music changes, fashions change, and you’re walking out into all of that”

7.8.4 Support during Transition.

A common theme was that they did not receive much support during their TR. One of the men stated that the only remarks made by prison officers upon the prisoners’ return to the prison would be to comment that they had made it back on time. Interestingly, one of the participants pointed out that even when he did meet with his Probation Officer following on from his TR, he would be unlikely to tell him truthfully how his TR had gone in case he would not get out again:

“And you’re going to say it went well, you’re not going to say ‘I couldn’t stand it’, because you’d be afraid you won’t get another one”

It appears from the data that, as with settling into prison life, the process of TR is something which the life-sentence prisoner also has to manage and cope with by themselves. Notwithstanding, all the participants spoke positively about their community based Probation Officers who would have supervised them upon their full release and who offer on-going support as well as supervision for the men:

“I suppose it took me a little over twelve months to get to know me welfare [Probation Officer] and get to trust her and now I can walk in and tell her everything... I can go in and talk about anything and that’s it. It’s between myself and the four walls”

7.8.5 From Closed to Open Prison Conditions.

The participants each spoke about their experiences of resettlement within the prison system itself – each of the men experienced a change in their living conditions during their sentence from locked to open prison conditions. The participants each explained that the transition to an open jail was made on average after 10years and 4months (range 7.5-13years) within prison conditions. This move brought with it many experiences which they had been denied within the closed prison and would have taken them some months to get used to:

“The transfer over to the Training Unit was a big one because they gave me the input to communicate with prisoners on a daily basis which meant eating with these prisoners now, whereas I used to be eating in my cell in Mountjoy... sitting down at a table humanly, you know. Eating off plates, not plastic plates or forks, real knives and real forks”

One of the men spoke about his experience of looking for somewhere to go to the toilet in his cell in the middle of the night when he moved to an open prison, when in fact, he explained, he could have left his cell and used a toilet in the corridor – he had become so used to being locked in.

Two of the participants spoke about the visual aspect of being in more open conditions where they were getting to see things they had not seen in a long time:

“No bars on the windows you know. Beautiful scenery and flowers and gardens and better workshops”

“I think I stood out maybe because I was there about a week, went up the stairs to the Training Unit, and there’s a cherry blossom tree and it was in full bloom and the sun was behind it, and I just stood there mesmerised, because I hadn’t seen it in so long... Because all I’d seen for eight years was a grey wall”

Much of the data suggests this move was an important one for the prisoners, although a positive experience after a while, the men explained that initially they had feelings of wanting to return to closed prison conditions. After a period of months, the men describe how they managed to get used to having more freedom although this brought with it an important realisation, as one man explained:

“... for my first six months in the Training Unit were kind of ‘what am I going to do here?’ totally different routine, that I eventually got used to the routine. Because again now, it comes back to that I was institutionalised... I actually was institutionalised, and I think anybody in prison, whether they spend a week or a month or a year or twenty years, they will become institutionalised, because it’s such a set routine. It doesn’t change”

7.9 Moving on from a life-sentence.

Although the men admitted that their sentence had brought with it some negative consequences, there was also a sense that the sentence had brought with it some constructive outcomes. For one participant, the discipline instilled in him as a prisoner, had created in him an important shift in his reactive thinking and behaviour which had led to his conviction in the first place:

“...when I was outside me thinking was off the wall at times you know, I wasn’t a constructive thinker. I didn’t plan anything, it was always in slow motion...I’d let things slip, I just wouldn’t concentrate you know. But when I was in prison and I entered into the discipline of what this is about and when it was laid down to me on the line... kind of this is where you are at and if you step out of line you know what the consequences are. And it sort of, I lived with that fear every day until I got released...I am more positive today. I plan everyday what I want to do”

For another participant, he used his time in prison to look at his life and sort out some of the difficulties he went into prison with:

“... I was 25, I was immature, and drinking an awful lot, a lot of problems I hadn’t dealt with. Post conviction I done a lot of work within the system on myself”

In terms of moving on from their life-sentence, the general feeling from the participants was that they would rather forget and leave their sentence well behind them. Only one of the men regularly socialized with another ex-prisoner, the remainder chose not to have regular contact with whom they had served time.

The memory of prison for the men was a difficult one and one which they chose only to retrieve when needs must, such as when signing on monthly at the Training Unit as part of their conditions for being on-license. But out of choice the men said they preferred to forget their sentence and look forward to their future. Notwithstanding, once in a while, their memory would get the better of them, as one man explained:

“Sometimes when I’m out I get a shutter up me spine thinking of the years, and if you put that into hours, it’s frightening, the number of hours, frightening. You

know. I try to put it into the Pandora's Box and keep it there. But well you know, when [...] asked me to do this I said yeah, if it helps the girl in college. But I wouldn't be erm...I wouldn't give myself to the newspapers or sell it to an author or anything like that. It's my experience and this to me would be a one off do you know what I mean? But I wouldn't like to be talking about it daily or every month. Just put it away now, it's done and dusted now, you know. Just get on with your life"

CHAPTER 8

8. DISCUSSION

The focus of this study was to explore the direct consequences of life-sentences. The study sought to examine what have been referred to as the *pains of imprisonment* (Sykes, 1958); how prisoners coped; and the impact the life-sentence had on prisoners post-release. From the literature reviewed and the interviews conducted, it is clear that the experience of life-sentence imprisonment is a complex one and that such a sentence has an impact upon many facets of the lives of those serving it. How each person copes, however, varies greatly and not an area which lends itself well to any generalisations.

In the general population people vary enormously in their coping mechanisms, life-sentence prisoners are no different. It was clear from this study that there is a wide range of methods of coping within the prison environment and that not all life-sentence prisoners respond the same. What did become clear however is that the impact of long-term exposure to the authority and discipline of the prison environment upon life-sentence prisoners' behaviour is similar.

The participants, although they did have varying difficulties during their sentence and various methods of coping with these, all appear to have been conditioned and disciplined by their time in prison. To this researcher, these men resembled army graduates with their disciplined approach to life and their strong grasp on self-control. In this way, it could be said that the prison system has served a reformatory function insofar as it was perhaps due to the men not having strong self-control which led to their being convicted of murder in the first place. It was clear from this study that the man going into his life sentence is a very different one to the one coming out the other end.

The purpose of this study was never to challenge sentencing policy for those convicted of murder, the aim being to solely examine the impact of life-sentences. Notwithstanding, the sense of survival emanating from the men interviewed cannot be under-estimated. To look in real terms at the length of time these men served in custody, they lost nearly two decades of their lives within the prison system. It only takes brief consideration of the changes that have occurred both personally and professionally in one's own life during the past even ten years to realise what a long time that is to be locked away from society. The men spoke of the difficulty they experience in looking back and remembering their time in

custody; some of the men becoming visibly upset when discussing aspects of their detention. Survival was a strong theme and all the men spoke of the negativity, distrust and violence inherent in prison and the willpower it took for them to preserve their sanity and remain focussed and strong.

What was most startling from the interviews was how the problems the men spoke about with regard to their resettlement were a lot more simplistic than the researcher first anticipated. The men spoke candidly of simply learning to use a toilet again; using proper knives and forks; seeing plants and trees again for the first time in years; crossing the road. The main obstacle they recounted was simply losing the expectation that they were locked in. Academic research can easily fall foul to over analysis and examination of issues, whereas from the perspective of those being studied although there is of course some weight upon the more complex aspects of their experience, the actual stories from the men's perspectives paint a much simpler picture. It is perhaps the mundane nature of some of the difficulties faced by the life-sentence prisoner which were the most fascinating to this researcher.

What also emerged from this study was that while it is clear that there are a number of resettlements challenges for the men entering society after a life-sentence, there were as many difficulties faced by the men when they were merely being moved from closed to open prison conditions. This transition is an area about which not enough was known entering into the interviews. The men explained what it was like for them to be out of the strict regime of the closed prison system and that it took them at times months to come to terms with their new prison environment. What becomes clear at this point to this researcher is the sheer weight of the challenge it must have been for these men when faced with the outside world and their relative freedom for the first time.

The sense of loneliness for these men was another strong theme. The feeling of being alone in an environment which is crammed with people is a strange concept. Human beings by their nature are social animals and do fear loneliness, for the life-sentence prisoner, however, loneliness was their reality for years. In this way, at the risk of whitewashing, to meet people who have spent time in an environment as lonely and dark as the prison environment for so many years was undoubtedly interesting. There really was a sense that these men have survived something quite difficult and have come out the other side better men than they

were going in. Probably due to the dark and painful nature of the experience of these men, it was hardly surprising that they simply wished to put the memory behind them and move on. It was in light of this that this researcher was so grateful for their contribution to this study considering what a difficult memory it was for them to recount.

Although these men had been through a very difficult time, it was good to hear from them that they accepted they had actually gained something positive from their sentence. For some it was discipline and positive personal changes, for others it was a good education and work ethic. Although prison is indeed a dark place, the men interviewed here chose to make the most of their situation which is perhaps the best thing a man can do with a life-sentence – it is literally a case of do or die. These men were the ones who had survived and made the most of their situation and in many respects were an inspiring group.

What is clear to this researcher nonetheless, is that the number of men interviewed is not a sample which is large enough for generalisation and so, how far the men's stories represent the wider life-sentence prisoner population is impossible to ascertain. What has been gained from this study, however, is a more vivid picture of the issue at hand but is by no means enough to draw any general conclusions about life in custody and post-release for the life-sentence prisoner.

The contribution made by this study is its attempt to open the way for further understanding of life-sentence imprisonment. The importance of understanding the effect of life-sentence imprisonment in order that society is aware of the consequences of locking people away for long periods need not be underestimated. As increasingly courts pass life-sentences there will likewise be increasing numbers of life-sentence prisoners released into the community. In this researcher's opinion it would be reasonable to expect society to be aware of who is being released back into the community and for Governments to take more responsibility for this group of prisoners.

CHAPTER 9

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the information gained from this study, this researcher would recommend the following in terms of treatment of life-sentence prisoners:

- Make available more specialised psychological services to life-sentence prisoners upon their entry into the prison system to help them to come to terms with their sentence.
- Provide prison officers with adequate training so they may be better able to assist the life-sentence prisoner in custody.
- Make available some support groups for life-sentence prisoners both within the prison and in the free community.
- Provide adequate support and preparation for life-sentence prisoners through their transition from the closed to open prison system.
- Provide more support to life-sentence prisoners on Temporary Release.
- Provide extra support and resources to the visiting families of life-sentence prisoners.

In terms of further research into the area, this researcher would recommend the following:

- Future research should be on a much larger scale so as to glean a much broader picture of the issues faced by life-sentence prisoners.
- Separate studies to be conducted which focus on the three aspects examined here so as to give more weight to the important issues of coping, resettlement and the effects of imprisonment.
- More research needs to be conducted on the impact upon the family of those serving life-sentences.
- Additional research should be conducted on the issues faced by female life-sentence prisoners.
- More research needs to be conducted on the role played by the conviction of murder and how this impacts upon both the prisoner and their family.
- Public attitudes towards this group of prisoners also need to be explored.
- More research on the transition between open and closed prison conditions.

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APPENDIX A

Age:

Age at sentencing:

Age upon release:

Year of release:

Length of time served in prison:

Journey through prison system – which prisons served in and for how long?

Previous prison sentence: Y/N

Can you tell me about your experience within prison?

- Did you work in prison (i.e. kitchen?)
- Did you make any lasting friendships?
- Experiences of arguments/falling out?
- Can you identify any period of your sentence which could be described as particularly difficult? Beginning/Middle/End?
- Experience of prison environment – discipline/prison officers/changes amongst inmates?

Coping?

- How did you cope within prison? (i.e. Working/Self-harm/Drug use/sleeping/reading/arts and crafts (hobbies)/religion)
- In what ways did Prison Service/Probation support or guide you through your sentence?

Impact of sentence?

- Any sense of personal change/deterioration? (Institutionalisation; change in how you view the world/other people; positive or negative changes).

Contact with outside?

- Family contact? – did this alter as the sentence progressed?/Which family members did you maintain contact with the most?
- Did you receive letters from the outside (i.e. old friends, family)?
- Did outside contact have any impact upon your coping with prison?

Family?

- Did you have any children when starting your sentence?
- Did you maintain relationship with your children during your sentence? If so how? What was your experience of parenting during your sentence?
- Did you experience any relationships breakdown during your sentence (wife/girlfriend/siblings/parents).

Release/Re-integration

- At what stage during your sentence did you begin to look at your release? (i.e. contact with Probation/Governor/Parole Board?
- What did the Parole Board ask you?/discuss with you?
- What processes did you experience leading up to your release? (i.e. counselling/psychological support/temporary release/work in community).
- How, if at all, has your prison sentence impacted upon your re-integration into the community? (i.e. patterns of behaviour/coping skills learned in prison; out of touch with outside world; out of touch with family/friends/positive or negative impact of sentence).
- What support did you receive from family/friends/probation/community/other service?
- Any ongoing difficulties as a result of sentence?

General

- Do you have any suggestions of what may help life-sentence prisoners either during their sentence or post release?
- Any other thoughts/comments?

APPENDIX B

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking your time to consider this research.

Please read the following carefully:

I have been informed of the research being conducted by Clara Geaney (MA Criminology student at DIT) and hereby give my consent to participation. I understand the following:

- **The research is identifying what, if any, challenges are faced by life sentence prisoners during their sentence.**
- **My interview will be recorded for research purposes only.**
- **My name and any other identifying particulars will not be made available to anyone but Clara Geaney who is conducting the research.**
- **I understand that in the research paper my name and address will be changed.**
- **Any information received is for research purposes only and will not be given to any other PACE staff member.**
- **I understand that the audio recording will be destroyed once it has been transcribed.**
- **I understand that if I am unclear about any aspect of this research I can ask Clara Geaney for clarification.**
- **I understand that the interview is for research only and is not intended as a counselling or support session.**
- **I may withdraw from the study at any time.**

Signed

Participant

Clara Geaney

APPENDIX C

11-7-08

Dear *****,

Following on from our conversation on 9th July last, please find enclosed information regarding my intended research. I have enclosed a summary of my intended research; a breakdown of the intended interview schedule and a copy of the consent letter as requested.

I appreciate your time to consider my research.

Regards

Clara Geaney

APPENDIX D

“James”

Age: 43
Age at sentencing: 22
Age upon release: 40
Length of time served: 18 ½ years
Previous prison sentence? No

Journey through prison system: Cork prison 1year, CMH* 2years, Arbour Hill 9-10years, Loughlin House 18months, Castlerea 3years, Shelton Abbey 18months.

J = James

C = Researcher

C: I would just like to talk a little about inside the prison...
J: Yeah
C: ...and how you passed your sentence, did you work?
J: I was in the ...er....kitchens.
C: For the whole sentence?
J: I was in wood work shop for a while and then I was in the brail shop then I went to the rubber shop ... that was it... I was a cleaner on the landing too for a while.
C: Was this throughout all the different prisons you were in?
J: Yeah, all different prisons. But mostly I was in the kitchens anyway... unless I had a row with the old chef, then I would fuck off for a while...
C: You would have a row with the chef?
J: Yeah!
C: Would the chef also be a prisoner?
J: No the chef was an officer or a screw...
C: And why would you be rowing with the chef?
J: He would be trying to tell me what to do and I should be telling him what to do.
C: OK...
J: We would be fighting over food.
C: You and the chef?
J: Yeah. He said I should be feeding this officer and not that one and I take into a humours and so I would just walk out.
C: And when you fell out in the kitchen you would go off to another job?
J: Yeah... but only for a week or two then I would be back in the kitchen again.
C: Was the kitchen your favourite?
J: Mmmm. I love cooking, there is nothing in cooking at all sure...
C: And do you still do cooking?
J: Yeah.
C: Would you have learned how to do cooking in prison?

* Central Mental Hospital, Dundrum Forensic Psychiatric Service.

J: Yeah I learned it all in prison yeah, but I was taught a bit now before I was locked up by my mother, she used to say we would not always have a woman to look after us.... She used to stand us over the ironing aswell. How to sew on buttons and iron our shirts... but I picked up all the main stuff up in prison.

Pause

C: About friendships in prison, would you have made good friends in prison?

J: You make an awful lot of friends in prison, yeah...I usually mixed up with mostly with lifers or fellas doing big sentences...

C: Is that what tends to happen? That life sentence prisoners stick together?

J: Yeah, keep away from the guys doing a month or two...in a lock up jail. But when you go to open jail you meet fellas doing a month, three months or 4months. When I was down in Shelton Abbey there were dormitories...you could have five or seven or eight in a dorm but you had no other choice...

C: To get friendly?

J: Yeah...

C: But out of choice you would probably have preferred to stick with guys on long sentences?

J: Yeah... but there weren't that many lifers down in Shelton, there would be only one or two

C: OK.

J: Yeah...

C: And did you have any falling outs, apart from with the officer in the kitchen but perhaps with other prisoners?

J: You always get rows amongst prisoners, but it would only be mouth talk there wouldn't be fists or anything...

C: After a falling out because of the closed environment...

J: Yeah

C: Would you have to keep passing each other or were you able to keep your distance?

J: You see prisoners... when a fella is doing life, they don't like to get into rows because of they get into one, they know they are going to hold him back for a few years.

C: Right, so would you say life sentence prisoners are probably the best behaved prisoners? Would that be the case?

J: In some cases yeah.

C: For you?

J: I was, yeah.

C: You kept your head down...

J: Kept me head down and get out of here that's it, but it's up to yourself, you have to show that.

C: Did you feel like that in the prison, that you feel like you are being watched?

J: Yeah. You are being watched the whole time yeah.

C: By prison officers?

J: By prison officers yeah. When I went jail first it didn't bother me... I used to give the officers stick.

C: I was going to ask what it was like when you went in first...

J: Er... it was a shock. A big shock... you had people telling you what to do and you lost your freedom. Took me about 2 or 3 years to get settled into the prison...

C: You were in shock? What was that like for you?

J: Missing all the good things you were doing outside... when you are locked up everything is gone, everything was taken away...

C: When you say everything can you explain that to me, I have a fair idea but from your perspective what were you missing?

J: Er...missed your family, missed your friends, missed your few pints, missed your woman... when the summer comes then and you are locked into your cell and the next minute the sun is blazing through your window you'd be thinking if I was out now I would be out on the beach.

C: So would you say that the beginning of the sentence, that shock, was the worst part for you?

J: Yeah it was the worst part...but once you get settled down then that's it...

C: Once you get settled then it gets better?

J: You see you have to forget about the outside... you have to completely blank that off and just get on with your time.

C: And how did you learn to do that? Or how did you know to do that?

J: From other lifers... they used to say just blank the outside, because you have no other choice. If you keep thinking about the outside you are only making things harder for yourself but they were right though...

C: And that's how you managed to settle in?

J: But once I got settled down that was it.

C: When you say about forgetting about the outside, and thinking only of the inside, does that mean then you get completely involved... what made you focus on the inside? Was it about going to work?

J: Going to work, then I would keep myself busy in the kitchen, you are mostly kept busy in the kitchens, and keeping your mind occupied and... forgetting about the outside and concentrating on what you have to do on the inside.

C: And would you just go from day to day?

J: Oh yeah... day to day yeah.

C: You wouldn't make any long term plans?

J: No you can't make any plans when you are in prison at all you can't make any plans, no plans at all.

C: No long term plans at all?

J: Can't... even when you go up in front of the parole board after 7½ years, you still can't make plans because you don't know what they are going to say.

Pause

C: When you were sentenced you were given no release date?

J: No just given a life sentence. That was it... no idea when I was getting out

C: So what was that like?

J: A very big shock... I just wanted to get up on the window and hang myself...

C: You just had no idea when you were going to get out?

J: No idea no...

C: And you were saying that even when you meet with the Parole Board, you still don't know.

J: No. When I got to see them after 7½ years I got word back then they would see me next year. They wanted me to go to an AA meeting. I had an argument about that. They said you were told by the Welfare... well excuse me I said I only seen the Welfare 5times I said and he never told me to go to no AA meetings. I got word then to go to AA and we will see you in 12months, 12months came I didn't go to AA and I went up again and I was out back for 3years.

C: So you were put back for 3years before they would meet you again?

J: Yeah, then I met them and was put back for another think it was 2years, then I got moved to an open prison.

C: So after 11years you were moved to an open prison?

J: Yeah.

C: So what was that like after 11years in a closed prison being moved to an open prison?

J: When I went down to an open prison when I got in an officer said you can use the phone there, he said you get a card, I looked and I said what kind of a card? He said you have them up in the shop you can get one up there tomorrow morning. I looked and I said what I am supposed to do? He brought me over and showed me how to use the phone, how to put in the card and the lot.

C: So you were given access to a phone whenever you wanted to use it?

J: Yeah, but you had to buy your own phone card first. It was like a pay phone but you had to buy a card first. Either one for E2, E5 or E10.

C: So did you notice any change in yourself when you moved to the open prison?

J: The next morning the officer came down to my room and said are you coming down for breakfast, I said I would be down in a minute. He came up to me 3or 4 times and then said to me I thought you were coming down for breakfast? I said the door is locked sure, how can I get out? The officer said the doors are never locked here.

C: So you had become so used to being locked in that you had to be encouraged to come out of your room?

J: Yeah. I was in a single room down there and I actually woke up during the night and I was going around looking for a piss pot. There was no piss pot and I had to turn around a use the sink.

C: But actually you could have left your room and gone to the bathroom?

J: Yeah.

C: So what was that like to realize you had a bit more freedom?

J: After a week or two I used to say I wish I was back in a lock up jail.

C: Why did you feel like that?

J: Because I wasn't able to mix with fellas going around crying over doing 2 or 3 months looking for week ends out.

C: And were there any other prisoners on long sentences down there?

J: There was one or 2 down there doing life sentences.

C: And did you get a chance to speak to them?

J: I did alright, but they didn't like it either. Too many fellas coming in doing small sentences. Looking for week ends claiming they were entitled to a week end.

Pause

C: With regard to contact with the outside and the need to forget about the outside...

J: Yeah, you have to.

C: Did you have any contact with the outside?

J: I did yeah. I had me family that's all... my family came up every Saturday. If they weren't able to come up on the Saturday, they would make sure to come up on the Friday.

C: And can I ask, which family members came up to you?

J: I had my mother, father and the brothers.

C: All of your brothers?

J: They would come up different days though. I would have 2 visits a week. The mother and father would come up on a Saturday and the brothers would come up on a Tuesday or a Wednesday. That was a special visit, I used to put in for an extra visit... when I was in Arbour Hill then I used to get a visit around half ten and the family could be up there until around 11:30 or 12 o'clock and if they weren't busy they would let me stay on for the visit.

C: So you could have about an hour or an hour and a half?

J: Yeah.

C: And how long should visits have been?

J: You should have only got about 35 minutes.

C: But you were getting a good extra hour?

J: Yeah. Because they were coming up from the country most of the officers used to look after me because I used to scratch their backs and they used to scratch my back.

C: When you say that, how did you used to look after the prison officers?

J: I'd throw them out a dinner. I used to be finished cooking about 10 o'clock at night time but very seldom I used to go to my cell. I used to be in the back room watching telly and would have me few hours sleep. I used to be up every morning at 6 but I used to go to me cell at 1 o'clock and I wouldn't get up then until about 2:30 and go back then and get the tea ready and go back to me cell at about 4:30 and one of the boys used to give me a should at 7:30. That was the time when they fall in you see and the boys in the kitchen used to take over and let me have me sleep and he would call me at 7:30 and that was me then I would be watching telly all night and have me one or two hours sleep on the chair. Having a few spliffs of hash.

C: Would you have used any other drugs?

J: No only a bit of hash.

C: And would you have smoked hash regularly in prison?
J: Oh yeah. I used to have about 5 or 6 joints a day maybe more.
C: Throughout your sentence?
J: No I was only on it for about 7 or 8 years. At the beginning when I was after getting the life sentence. I started on and off when I was on remand before sentencing.
C: So for the first half or so of your sentence you used hash?
J: Yeah. I used to get drunk now and again when I was in the prison. The odd old officer used to bring in a bottle of spirits.
C: And what was that like?
J: Oh, it used to be grand. Go into a completely different world and forget about prison.
C: And were you able to forget about prison?
J: Yeah.

Pause

C: Your contact with the outside, did you maintain any contact with friends you left in the outside?
J: I made better friends in prison. Your best friends are in prison. Everyone used to help one another.
C: Would that be the life sentence prisoners?
J: Yeah the lifers, yeah. Lifers or fellas doing big sentences. See when I was in prison for a while in the early eighties there was a fella he was doing 12years. That was the biggest sentence ever in the early eighties.
C: Right.
J: And fellas used... say for sex offenders they were only getting 3 or 4years for rape at that time. This fella was in on a manslaughter charge, he got 12years. Everyone used to go up to his cell and go in and have a look at the guy doing 12years. There used be lifers getting out at that time after doing 4 or 5 years.
C: Right, so when you went in a life sentence was a lot longer?
J: They started getting longer then yeah... and its getting longer again now you see.
C: Yeah. What do you think that is going to do to the guys getting long sentences?
J: Er... it's not going to solve anything is it? It's not going to stop any of the murders. The murders today are all er... drug related.

Pause

C: I wanted to ask you, before you met with the Parole Board, did anyone within the prison service sit down with you and discuss your sentence or offer any support to you?
J: No. No plan, no nothing, you have to do it yourself. You might meet a Probation Officer once and he will tell you this or tell you that, but you have to do it yourself.
C: You have to learn to cope by yourself?
J: By yourself. But with some help from other prisoners but you don't get any help from the screws or er a Probation Officer inside of the prison

because he doesn't want to know. He only wants to know when you are going on up to the Parole Board after 7 ½ years, then he might see you 3 or 4 times.

C: And Probation may give you some advice on your coming meeting with the Parole Board?

J: He's just looking for information off you.

C: Right and the prison officers, do they offer to help you or guide you through?

J: No. It's up to yourself. The way they look at you're only a number.

C: That's how they see you?

J: Yeah, you're only a number in their eyes. They are there to do a job and make sure you're getting your 4 meals a day and er make sure of your health and safety and that's it.

Pause

C: What about your health during your sentence, your physical health? Was it bad or was it good or did you feel healthier?

J: Er, when I went in first now I er, my health went down. I brought myself down. I got depressed from the fright. I got very depressed. I went downhill at first for a while.

C: And did that mean you weren't eating well?

J: I wasn't eating well and I was on medication. I used to be saving up my sleeping tablets and I'd take an overdose and I'd be down for a week or two.

C: Were you trying to kill yourself at this time?

J: No. I often used to think about it alright. I often broke up stereos and all whilst in the prison.

C: And why would you do this?

J: I was very depressed.

C: For the first maybe 3 years or so?

J: Yeah. Very depressed yeah. I was brought to Dundrum then. I was after breaking up a steel bed and they brought me up to Dundrum then. When I was going there he said to me, the doctor, now you got it all out your system. I was after breaking the cell up. He said when you did that you got it all out now. He said a few weeks or a few months up in Dundrum will do you the world of good, give you a break from prison.

C: So did you break up the prison cell because you were so unhappy and frustrated?

J: Yeah.

C: And your stay in Dundrum, did that help you?

J: Yeah for a while and then I went back into the prison routine again.

C: So how were you when you left Dundrum?

J: I was grand then.

C: You felt better then?

J: Yeah felt better and got back into smoking the old hash... it takes away from the prison.

C: And did this also provide you with friendship and having a lugh with other prisoners?

J: Yeah I had a laugh.

Pause

C: Just following on from all of that, I am just wondering how being released was for you. What was that like following on from your sentence? When you were released or did you go through temporary release?

J: I started getting week ends then first. I started off with one week end in every month that went on for maybe 2 or 3 months. When I was getting closer to me time then they started more then, the first few months I was getting every week end then I got temporary release then in the September it was yeah. And er...the first few weeks used to tear lumps out of me.

C: What would happen?

J: I used to be nervous going into town and I used to be nervous going into shops because I didn't know the money at all. I didn't know how much for anything.

C: OK. So you just weren't used to things any more?

J: Yeah. I wasn't able to cope. People were running they weren't walking.

C: What did that feel like?

J: I used to say to myself everyday I wish I was back in prison I wouldn't have all this at all. Going into shops paying for this and trying handle money.

C: Right. So you had to learn how to do all of that?

J: And adjust to people from the outside.

C: And how long would you say that took you?

J: That took me maybe 2 ½ years. Even to walk across the road I wouldn't even look up and down I would just keep going. I wouldn't even bother to look up and down.

C: And why would you not look up and down?

J: Because they are things you would never do when you were inside.

Pause

C: What was that like to think that you had changed like that? Were you aware of having changed at all?

J: Prison changes your life you see. I often used to say I wish I was back inside.

C: And you felt like this for maybe 2 years or so?

J: Yeah. And I'm still learning how to adjust to people at times. We are all learning.

C: Are there still things now that you think have come from your time in prison?

J: I learn every day, we all do.

C: When you say we all do you mean all lifers or just every body?

J: Everyone does, it doesn't make a difference whether you are outside or inside. We learn things off different people everyday, we all do. You are learning from me and I am learning from you.

C: I am certainly learning from you.

Pause

C: Did you use the same things that you coped in prison with like smoking a bit of hash or having a drink, as a way of coping when you came out?

J: No, I no...I didn't touch a drink now for the last, what, probably the last 15years, same way with hash.

C: OK. So how did you cope when you got out?

J: I found it very hard.

C: Did you talk to any body? Or what tends to happen with life sentence prisoners, do they tend to look for support from one another on the outside for support?

J: Er, I often see lifers now and will often stop and talk and then there's other people I will see and I will say I am in a hurry and tell them I am going somewhere I am late. I just keep my distance.

C: Why is that? You just weren't friends anyway?

J: It's their attitude you see, I don't like their attitude towards people. When they were inside and the way they carried on and they were always in trouble and when they are out they are even watched.

C: What by who?

J: By the Gardai.

C: Are these other lifers?

J: Other lifers or fellas after doing 10 or 15year sentences. I know a good few gangsters now around Dublin. Some fellas I would stop and talk to and others I wouldn't. There could be a Garda up the road watching them.

C: And you don't want that?

J: No. Even when I came out first I would often be up town now and the next minute I hear my name and someone shouting WHEN DID YOU GET OUT?!

C: Oh no.

J: Yeah.

Pause

C: So you say in prison life sentence prisoners tend to hang around together

J: Yeah. They tend to mix with fellas doing big sentences, very seldom would they mix with the fellas doing small sentences.

C: And were there special areas for people doing life sentences?

J: No. No special wings at all, no. Just all mixed in. You were mixed with all sorts of prisoners doing a month or two, 3 months, 4months, 4 years, 5years, 10years.

C: And what was that like people coming in and out all of the time? Or would you have even noticed it?

J: You notice it but after a while you don't take any heed of it, you managed to ignore it.

C: Just again another thing on prison, was it overcrowded? In terms of space?

J: Oh yeah, it was very overcrowded, yeah still is today sure in prison. Very overcrowded.

C: So would you have had much privacy? Or private space to yourself at all?

J: In Mountjoy now you wouldn't have much privacy, you could be in a three man cell or a 4man cell, but when I went to Arbour Hill then I got my own single cell.

C: And you were in Arbour Hill for 9-10years?

J: Yeah. And I enjoyed it.

C: Having your own space?

J: Yeah, because it was all long Termers. You were talking about 50 lifers and the rest were all doing between 10-15years. You had to be doing over 7years to get into Arbour Hill at that time.

C: So you would have fallen into that category and you got your own cell?

J: Me own cell, yeah. But now in Arbour Hill its all changed again.

C: And what's happening now in Arbour Hill?

J: It's nearly all sex offenders there now.

Pause

C: Generally speaking, do you have any ideas yourself about people doing life sentences? Do you think life sentences are a good idea, or if they have to happen, do you have any ideas of what might help people through a life sentence?

J: Er... it's up to each person themselves what way they are going to do time. I can advise someone on how to do it, but its up to them if themselves at the end of the day.

C: People cope differently.

J: Yeah, they cope differently. Same as on the outside. They all cope differently. You cope different than I do. We all do.

C: And it's the same for people on a life sentence?

J: Yeah. The same as people on a life sentence, yeah.

C: Do you think that the Prison Service or Probation could do anything to support life sentence prisoners during their sentence?

J: There should be more things for prisoners, yeah.

C: What would you suggest?

J: They should be told when they go into the prison if you do your sentence this way or that way, these are the things that's going to happen. You're the one that has to show us. And they have to give long term prisoners and lifers help, if they don't give help they are not going anywhere. There's no help for anyone in any of the prisons.

C: And when you say help, do you mean psychological support?

J: Help, yeah. Counselors, yeah. There should be more counselors for prisoners when there's none.

C: You didn't come across any in prison?

J: No, if they are counseling for sex offenders and er, I think Wheatfield does some counseling for lifers but at the end of the day it's up to yourself. I think er, it's up to yourself if you go to those professionals or not.

C: Would you have been given any support?

J: Er no. No support at all. Even when I came out I had to do everything myself.

C: When you were released?

J: I had to do it all myself. I suppose it took me a little over 12 months to get to know me welfare and get to trust her and now I can walk in and tell her everything.

C: You are still with the same Probation Officer you were assigned when you were released?

J: Yeah same one. I could go in and tell her to fuck off tomorrow and she would only laugh at me.

C: And she still works with you now?

J: Yeah still works with me yeah.

C: And how often would you meet up with her?

J: Every fortnight. I can go in and talk about anything and that's it. It's between myself and the four walls.

C: It's confidential and you can tell her anything?

J: Yeah tell her anything.

C: And is she a good support to you?

J: Yeah... a good support yeah.

C: Do you have any ongoing problems as a result of the life sentence and would she help you with that?

J: Just whatever is coming up for me at the moment, but nothing major. She tells me once I get to leave [hostel] everything will be fine and I'll get my own place and that's it.

C: And is that your focus? To get your own place?

J: Yeah that's my focus.

Pause

C: Well, have you got anything else you would like to say about life sentences or anything about your sentence which I haven't asked?

J: I would just like to say it's not going to solve things. I mean you are always going to have murder in this country. It just happens out of the blue.

C: So when you say that a life sentence is not going to solve anything, where it is designed to deter other people you don't think it is going to make a difference?

J: No. The only ones it might stop is the criminal gangs they're the ones who might be getting 40 years but the ordinary Jo Soap no. It's always going to be there and it's not going to solve anything. How many murders are done just out of the blue? It does happen.

C: Yeah. I understand what you are saying.

J: No one knows what's around the corner. You could turn around and hit me and I could bang me head off of that [points to a heater in the room]. I've seen fellas getting life sentence should never have got it. But it all depends on the Jury at the end of the day, you could have a good Jury and then you could have a bad Jury.

C: So would you say a lot of it is down to the case in court and who's representing you?

J: Not really, it's down to the Jury at the end of the day. Who they believe. They either believe the State or...

C: The defendant?

J: The defendant, yeah.

Pause

C: Just another thing. Getting back into contact with your family upon your release, because you saw them every week end...

J: Yeah.

C: Would that have made it a little easier for you when you were released?

J: Er, yeah. But I was still nervous though. Yeah I was still nervous.

C: What do you think you were nervous about?

J: Getting to know them again. And to trust them. And probably they are learning to be around me aswell.

C: You think so?

J: Yeah.

C: Because they hadn't seen you free in a long time?

J: Yeah they hadn't seen me. They had only seen me for once a week for an hour that was it.

C: You mentioned trust there. Would you say that the prison environment itself makes you untrusting of people?

J: No, but when you walk into prison you have to do all things for yourself. The officers hardly look at you you are only a number. And fellas get out of prison every day ad the officers just say I will see you back in a week or two.

C: That's the attitude of the officers?

J: That's the attitude yeah [pause] there's never going to be any helkp within the prisons because you are only a number and that's it. And they are not qualified either.

C: The prison officers are not qualified?

J: Yeah.

C: What do you think they should be qualified in?

J: As counselors.

C: Was there any prison officers who helped you?

J: The chief did in Arbour Hill he said you are going the wrong way about doing your time he said. These other fellas will be moving on and you will be left here, he said. He said you either call me your mammy or your daddy. I'll be working here another 30 years he said, keep going the way you're going he said I'll be going out that door and you will still be here.

C: So he was saying to you to behave yourself and you will get out?

J: Yeah.

C: Did that give you a sense of hope then?

J: Yeah. It was the attitude I went in with and I was still with it, then I changed it. And he was right.

C: He was right to tell you that if you if you get your head down you will get out?

J: Yeah.

C: And when you did get your release date, what was that like?

J: I was drawing blood from me nails. I couldn't sleep. I used to be up doing the garden at 5 o'clock in the morning. I was like that for the first month and a half.

C: And how much notice were you given for your release date?

J: A few months. It was put back for a while because my Probation Officer was away. And then she told me it would be in September. I got out then in the first week of September. Actually no, it was the 7th September, because when the towers went up that time 4days later. There were 2 lifers where I was and they walked in and said what's the cowboy film? And I said that's not a cowboy film...

C: That's real.

J: Yeah.

C: Did seeing that make you more nervous about coming out?

J: It did yeah.

Pause

C: Well I think I have asked everything I need to ask.

J: You didn't know anything about lifers before? Well it is hard at first.

C: Your experience was that it took you about 3years to get settled?

J: Yeah, took about 3years. Some lifers settle down better than others you see. And when I came out first, I used to say I wish I was back inside.

C: Really?

J: Yeah.

C: And do you still think like that now?

J: Oh no. I wouldn't like to be in there now. I have to go up there every second Friday to sign on.

C: And what's that like?

J: I hate going up. Because you want to forget about it. See they tell you to forget about all those places but you can't. Twice I said to the Parole Board, I said Excuse me I said you want me to forget I have to go up there I said once a month to sign on. I said how can I forget? They all just looked over at me saying actually you are right and we are wrong in what we are saying.

C: So do you think any body ever fully forgets it?

J: Can't. It's always going to be there.

C: And when you look back, what's that like?

J: I don't like to talk about it. Because you want to forget about everything.

C: You want to move on?

J: Move on, yeah. The odd time you might think about it.

C: But you have moved on?

J: I have moved on yeah. I have great support from here [hostel], me Probation Officer and me job and me girlfriend. But it; sup to myself, no one else.

C: You have a lot of supports and you are doing very well.

J: Well I hope so anyway.

APPENDIX E

“Matthew”

| | |
|---|--|
| Age: | 43 |
| Age at sentencing: | 22 |
| Age upon release: | 41 |
| Year of release: | 2005 |
| Length of time served in prison: | 18years |
| Previous prison sentences: | No |
| Journey through prison system: | 7 ½ years Mountjoy prison 10years Training Unit |

M = Matthew

C = Researcher

C: I just want to talk about how you passed your prison sentence first of all. Were you working or did you go to college or what kind of stuff did you do when you were doing your sentence

M: When I was in Mountjoy I was in the carpentry shops and I done the Gym.

C: Right. And when you went to the Training Unit?

M: I done the Gym and I was in the welding shop.

C: And would you have worked throughout your sentence?

M: I always did yeah.

C: And why was that? Why would you have worked so much?

M: Er... to keep your mind occupied because if you are out sitting in the yard, just out in the yard all day you have too much time to think and your head would be wrecked.

C: So it was kind of a way of keeping yourself going?

M: Yeah. It was my way of coping with my sentence. Even the prison officer said he was coming around he says the gym's keeping you going he says.

C: The prison officer said that to you?

M: Yeah.

C: Did you make any friendships within the prison amongst other prisoners?

M: Yeah. With the country lads.

C: With the guys from the country?

M: Yeah. I mostly hung around with all the lifers.

C: I was going to ask, would you have mixed with guys on shorter term or would it have been mainly guys on long sentences?

M: No, they always talk about I'm getting out, I'm going here, I'm getting TR in the morning, I'm getting out for the long week end, I'm getting TR for Christmas and all that.

C: And you would have found that what hard to listen to or?

M: Well it didn't bother me, but I didn't want to listen because I knew I was going nowhere for years. So I hung around people who's doing life sentences or people who was doing 10 or 12 years or something. Because

we was all going nowhere. And if you get people coming in doing 6months they'd be winging in your ear Oh I'm doing 6 months it's wrecking me head.

C: And you may have already served a number of years at that stage?

M: Yeah. I didn't want to listen to that. I would just say go on and do your feckin time then, your feckin 6months then, I'm doing a bleeding life sentence and I don't know when I'm getting fucking out. Are you? Are you? They nearly died.

C: Yeah.

M: They don't understand.

C: So when you were in prison would you have had any arguments with anyone, any of the prisoners?

M: Believe it or not, the only arguments I had was playing hand ball against the travelers.

C: OK.

M: They wanted to beat us at hand ball but hey couldn't beat us. That's all you know. And probably had one or two arguments playing football. But I never had any arguments on the landings or anything.

C: And would that be kind of ordinary enough for guys doing life sentences that they tend to sort of keep quiet? Would that have been your experience?

M: They do yeah. They keep quiet, keep quiet. I basically kept to myself now. As I said now, I hung around with people doing long sentences but other than that I wouldn't talk to nobody. I would be nice and say hello and all that but basically just kept to myself. I was in the gym training myself and reading books.

C: You were reading aswell?

M: Reading books.

C: Is there a period of your sentence you could say was a particularly bad period?

M: Yeah. 1994. When I started getting paranoid.

C: Was that in the middle of your sentence?

M: Well around the middle. After about 7years. Because I even packed in training and all that. I actually didn't notice a change in myself but everybody else noticed it.

C: And you were saying you wee getting paranoid?

M: I could feel the walls closing in on top of me in my cell and all that and I had to snap myself out of it.

C: And how did you manage that?

M: I just trained I done a few sit ups and press ups in my cell and all that you know.

C: And was there anyone you could speak to other prisoners or staff?

M: Talked, no.

C: You talked with no one?

M: Spoke to no one.

C: And how long did that period last?

M: Well I went over to the Training Unit in August '94 and I never seen a Welfare in Mountjoy.

C: So for 7 ½ years you had no contact with any sort of professional?

M: No nothing. I only started seeing psychologists and psychiatrists when I went to the Training Unit and the Welfare. I was in Mountjoy one

day and see the Welfare and she says to me you are seeing the SRG* in October. She said yeah, er when was the last time you seen a Probation Officer? I said I been here 7years and I never seen a Probation Officer. And the Governor said to me well you will be seeing one this morning. And then 2weeks later I got transferred over to the Training Unit.

C: So the notice you got was about 2weeks before you were up for the SRG?

M: No. I got a couple of months.

C: A couple of months?

M: I moved during the summer but I had the review in October yeah.

C: Back to the prison environment, would you have any experience of a feeling of being watched all the time or under control?

M: Well the officers watch you and to see who you are hanging around with and all that. But your whole day is planned out for you in Mountjoy.

C: OK.

M: You get up in morning 8 o'clock, you get your breakfast, and then you're banged up until about 9:30, and then you're in the yard, you can go to the work shops you can go to the gym or go to school and then you get your dinner at 12 o'clock. And then you're banged up then until 2:30pm. And then you can do the same again you can go to the workshops or the gym or whatever and then you get your tea at 4pm. And then you're banged up until 5:30 and that's your recreation from half five to half seven. You can play pool or go to the gym or play football or sit in the yard. And then you're banged up at half seven for the night.

C: For the night and then opened again at 8 in the morning?

M: 8 in the morning or half 8 in the morning.

C: And what was that like going into that environment? Did you settle into that?

M: I did yeah. Well it took me like, I was in there 2nights and I wanted to hang myself you know... I'm getting upset now.

C: OK. Take a deep breath.

M: No but next morning I woke up and I says I'm going to get through this sentence. And I did get through it.

C: You did.

M: And I'm here to tell the story now.

C: This is it. We will move on to outside contact. Did you have visits did people come and see you? Or did you get letters?

M: Only my family.

C: Your family came up to visit you?

M: Yeah.

C: Can I ask which family members?

M: My ma and da and the brothers and my sisters.

C: And how often would they come up?

M: Every week.

C: Every week?

M: Mmmm.

C: And would you have looked forward to these visits?

M: Oh yeah, they were important to me, yeah.

* Sentence Review Group – Prior to Parole Board which was established in 1991.

[Participant is becoming visibly upset]

C: Would you like to stop?

M: For a second, yeah.

[Tape paused for a few minutes]

C: You were saying about working and the gym and that it was a way of coping, I just want to know how did you know that was the way that was going to help you.

M: Well you have to find out. Some people just take drugs for their sentence and that's how they cope with it.

C: Would that be for life sentence prisoners' aswell?

M: Most life sentence prisoners would smoke hash but hey wouldn't take heavy drugs like cocaine or heroin. I was in there for 2years and then I took a joint. I was 2years in there and a bloke gave me a joint and I puked me ring up that night. And I said I would never smoke it again and then about 6months later I tried it again. And that was it. So say about once a month I would smoke a couple of joints on a Saturday night and that's all. I often went about 9or 10months without smoking any hash.

C: OK. So it wasn't a kind of a regular thing?

M: It wasn't no.

C: And you were saying you would have read a lot.

M: Oh yeah. I read every night, yeah.

Pause

C: You were talking there in the break about change. You were saying that you didn't want the prison to change you.

M: No no, I wouldn't let it change me no.

C: So you were very conscious of that.

M: Mmmm.

C: So you wanted to be the same person coming out as you were going in?

M: Mmmm.

C: So how do you think you managed that?

M: By training in the gym and all that. Training in me cell and doing aerobics and down in the workshops and I just kept me head together as best I could.

C: Sort of a way of staying focused?

M: Focused yeah. Staying focused you know. And then when you're in prison a few years you forget all about the outside. You don't even think about the outside because I never thought about the outside for years because I was going nowhere. My life was in prison and I accepted that. So I just got on with it.

C: So did it take a while for you to be able to manage to leave the outside, outside?

M: Oh yeah.

C: So how long do you think that took you?

M: It took me about 12months. Then I just blanked it out of me head altogether.

C: At that stage would it have made things a little easier for you?

M: It does yeah. Because I worked in the shop with the carpenter and he says you'll accept your sentence now you're getting on alright. Just get on and do your sentence and keep going the way you're going.

C: And that's what you did you stayed focused?

M: Yeah.

C: I just want to talk a little about building up toward your release. At what stage did you begin to look at your release? Was it when you moved to the Training Unit?

M: Yeah, in the Training Unit.

C: Were you on Temporary Release prior to receiving full release?

M: Er, where do I start with this? When I sent to the SRG and then the Parole Board came in in '91 I seen them in 1995. And they recommended me to go to [community based training centre]. But me head wasn't the best.

C: Your head wasn't the best at this time?

M: Yeah. I was very sick with the paranoia and they sent me up to Wheatfield. And that's where I got smacked with eh snooker balls because the lads up there didn't want me on their landing because I was paranoid. And I was in hospital for 3 or 4 weeks then I had to go back and have a major operation on my nose and then I went to the CMH for 4 months. And then in June 1996 I went back to the Training Unit. And then October 1996 they let me out to [training centre].

C: So did you feel better by October 1996?

M: Yeah. I was on medication and all.

C: And in yourself you felt better and ready for release?

M: Yeah yeah.

C: You went to [training centre] for the day and then returned to prison in the evening?

M: Yeah. Return at about half five. And I couldn't judge the cars as I was crossing the road.

C: Because you weren't used to traffic?

M: Yeah. For the first time in 8 years I seen cars come speeding up and down.

C: And what was that like?

M: I was paranoid to death for a few days.

C: What were the kind of difficulties you noticed when you were released?

M: Often when I was out at week ends and I was in the shop I could feel my face going scarlet in shops. I had no confidence at all.

C: No confidence?

M: No shattered completely.

C: Was it a sense of people watching you or knew who you were or what was making you feel like that?

M: No when I went into the shop I would be grand then all of a sudden I just felt all funny, just my face burning up I was just feeling like that and legged it out of the shop. The metal detectors in the shop because they had metal detectors in the training unit and I had to walk through them 2 or 3 times a day. I wouldn't have anything n me now or anything, but coming up to it I could feel my face going red and I would be saying to myself I feel this

is going to go off and the security guards going to dive me. But I said I haven't anything on me, but god I would just leg it up the road. That's it. Mad stuff. But it happens to everybody.

C: And how long would you say that lasted?

M: That lasts for a while. Even when I got released full time I would be in HMV and I would see the metal detectors I would still get the same feeling – is this going to go off now? I wouldn't have anything. I wouldn't have even bought a CD or anything. I would just come to the alarm part and would think it's going to go off and then you're walking through them in the Training Unit and all that. That's it. It's funny but that's the way it goes you know. You see from talking to other lifers they say the same thing.

C: Would you find that upon release then that you sort of chatted alot with other life sentence prisoners? Did you tend to link in with them? As a support to eachother in the community?

M: Well I only hang around with one lifer now. That's all. Just me and [life sentence prisoner] and my few friends in work and all that. That's all. I went through bad patch when I got out. When I was in [hostel] when I got out in January I went through a bad patch but I put myself through it.

C: What other community supports would you have had upon release?

M: Well I had the psychiatrist and I had my key worker in [hostel]. That was it. But my key worker was not much good. I even said it to the manager and wrote her a big letter I asked for [staff member] and she wouldn't let me. I could pour my heart out to [key worker] and she would just sit there and then she would just sit there and wouldn't open her mouth. I says I want feedback off her.

C: So you were looking for a bit of input?

M: Yeah, yeah.

C: Following on from that do you feel you have any ongoing stuff since your release 2 ½ years ago? You do not need to go into major detail if this is difficult for you but do you have any ongoing difficulties that you think might be the result of the sentence?

M: No, no. I've forgotten all about the Training Unit. And even [Probation Officer] brings it up every so often, but I tell him I have forgotten all about it. I don't even think about it anymore.

C: So do you have a real sense of having moved on?

M: Oh yeah I've moved on yeah I've forgotten all about the Training Unit. I have to go back up the Training Unit next month to sign on.

C: How often do you have to sign on?

M: Every 3months. And I still see him [Probation Officer] every week [laughs].

C: Have you found your community based Probation Officer a good support to you?

M: Yeah, he's sound he is. Like he knows I take a drink but doesn't say anything to me.

Pause

M: I've moved on yeah. But I still think about my crime every so often like.

C: And what's that like for you?

M: It does be hard [looks upset].

C: Would you like to stop?

M: No, carry on.

Pause

C: One last question, I'm making recommendations in the paper I am doing, do you have any ideas on what might help guys on life sentences? Either during their sentence or upon release.

M: Well they should work with the Probation Service so they should. Like I said to you, my time in Mountjoy I never seen a Probation Officer in 7½ years.

C: So you think it would be more helpful to have contact maybe earlier on in the sentence?

M: Yeah. And talk about their crime and get their and get it all out. Because I remember when I went over to talk to the psychologists about my crime after nearly eight years my whole body was shaking talking about it.

C: Was this the first time you had the opportunity to discuss this?

M: In 8years yeah. So they should talk about and probably see doctors in the Joy and all that and help them cope with their sentence and all.

C: A little earlier on.

M: Earlier on in their time, yeah. And when they get out like, I know [hostel] was good for me but they should go to [hostel] on week ends like I was for a while. But I found then when I was in [hostel] when I got my head together I says it's time to get out of here. I still felt like I was in the prison environment, you know. They still talk of prison, in the TV room. All they talk about is bleeding drugs and they are coming in goofing off and I just got sick of this and went up to my room. I wanted to get away from all that.

C: So what do you think should happen, should there be a special house that...

M: I think all lifers should go straight into the [hostel semi-independent apartments] and be out of the house altogether. Or maybe put them in the house for a couple of months or whatever until they have their head together and then put them straight over to the apartments. And then let them stay there for I don't know 6-12months and then when they are ready to move on they can move on and then get on with their lives. Because the house is not right... [friend] even said it to me that [hostel] is not a proper house for lifers because of all the people taking drugs and listening to crime and drugs talk like and they spent years in prison looking at all that and then they are supposed to be out of prison and before they leave prison they are told you are going to [hostel] it's a lovely house and there's no drugs out there and then you walk in and you're sitting there and you're still looking at it. That's what I'd recommend. Keep lifers in house until they have their heads together and then and put them straight over to the apartments. All the lifers. And get them out of that environment altogether in the house looking at drugs and that's it you know. As I says to you like all the lifers I knew in Mountjoy none of them took heroin or coke or anything like that. They would smoke a bit of hash but there was no alcohol in Mountjoy, in the Training Unit we used to get bottles of it.

C: What would you get?

M: Well I remember one year I won't mention his name now, I had fifty Euro in my pocket right and I said to him any chance of getting a bottle of vodka for New Year's Eve, well he says are you going into the yard or are you staying in your cell, I says I'm staying in my cell. He says well give me that forty Euro, and the bottle probably cost only about 18 Euro but I let him keep the fucking forty Euro and that was it. So I called down me mate on New Years and I got on fairly well with the medical officer. He says no you're not down for a urine* until he second week in January and so he says have a good night. He was telling me I wasn't going to be called at half seven in the morning for a urine. But even if I was, he would just pour it down the sink.

C: The medical officer almost helped you out?

M: Yes. He would just pour it down the sink. But other prisoners going to him and taking heroin and drugs right and he's say...I used to go into him and say I'm having a drink will you take me off the urine and he'd be like yeah yeah but he wouldn't take them off the urine, they'd still be called in the morning.

C: So would this be guys on shorter sentences using drugs?

M: Yeah probably the last probably 9 or 10 months left out of a sentence. He used to tell me this because I got on great with him right, he used to take the urine off them in the morning and send it to the lab and it would come back with drink and heroin in it and you see he was wide to them all. He had no time for drugs because he takes a drink himself.

C: He would have given you a wider berth?

M: Oh yeah. But if it came up with heroin he would send you straight back. That's it. Even if it came back with hash he would send them back. He always said that if it came back with alcohol he would send them back if he didn't like them.

C: OK.

M: He would give them a hard time; he would still send them back. But the ones he liked if they came up with alcohol he just tear it up and throw it in the shredder, and that's the end then.

C: Would that be your experience of other prison staff, kind of if they like you they might do you a few favours but if they don't...

M: I wouldn't ask any of them to do me a favour apart from the drink with the medical officer. I wouldn't ask any of the other staff I wouldn't trust them, I just stuck to the two that was it.

C: So have you any other thoughts or comments?

M: No you have asked a lot you know. Like I remember I was in there for 3 years and there was a lifer on D1 and he was suicidal and they doubled him up for a couple of weeks and he was in with the psychiatrist and says I've had enough I want to go back to a single cell and he got his single cell and he hung himself that night in the cell. He had only served about 3 or 4 year.

C: So I imagine some guys cope differently or better than others?

M: I can remember sitting in the yard and a fella says you're doing a life sentence he says if I was doing life I would be full of drugs every night. He said I wouldn't be able to cope with it, he says. I said I don't take drugs I

* Urinalysis – screening of urine for drugs and alcohol.

says, I lash the gym out of it every day, training in my cell and read books, I says, or in the work shop. I wouldn't be sitting in the yard you know. That's how they do their jail; they haven't got the drugs they go to jail. Like on D1 there a couple of weeks ago, they said it was for overcrowding but it was the fact is they can't get the drugs in now... it just wasn't the over crowding, it's the drugs part of it.

C: Because you didn't have a drugs problem it allowed you to focus more...

M: I have to say after 7½ years I started getting paranoid. But that happens to everybody that's doing long sentences.

C: They go through a rough period?

M: Oh they do yeah. When they took me off the medication in '98 and 12moths later I got sick. I was supposed to get released in June '99 and it was just that [other hostel] I had a big argument with the lifers out there and they took me back in off my parole.

C: So your first release did not work out?

M: I was paranoid to death. I was hearing voices and when I get paranoid I don't eat me food because I think people are trying to poison me... bleeding mad stuff.

C: Did you ever experience that before your sentence?

M: No. Only when I was in prison.

C: So would you say the prison possibly brought it out in you?

M: The paranoia yeah. Some people cut themselves up, you can see all the scars on their arm. I remember one bloke in there you couldn't see his arm there were that many scars all over his arms, he used to cut himself every night.

C: Would you say that was because he was unable to cope?

M: Yeah. Can't cope in prison. Like there's all the hardened criminals all the gangland they go to jail and they can't do it. They are not able to do time. All of a sudden they are in a room 6 foot by 12 being locked up 19hours a day and they can't cope with it. Even they break down crying. What are supposed to be hard men crying in their cell and on sleeping tablets at night. I never took sleeping tablets.

C: So you were able to sleep?

M: I slept every night yeah.

C: And were you able to eat?

M: Well the grub in Mountjoy is horrible. I used to put loads of brown sauce all over it and wolf it down.

C: Because you were using the gym, physically you probably felt quite fit.

M: I was as fit as a fiddle. I'm thinking of going back training now aswell.

C: Did you feel physically strong when you were training before?

M: Yeah, yeah. Sure me arms were 17 inches. I took steroids in the Training Unit in '94. I asked my brother could he get me steroids. I told him I don't want steroids that make me penis go small I says he says no there's loads of steroids. When he came back he said there you are he says and it won't affect your manhood. I took them for 12weeks. I was huge yeah. There's a lifer there and he says you're getting very big he says you're on steroids he says, I said I'm not on steroids, he said the whole jail is saying it. Then me brother asks me if I wasn't some more, I says no I says the whole

jail is talking about it I didn't throw shapes. But you get people in the gym who do throw shapes. They walk around with their arms like this. It's a buzz. Like if you see people on the outside and if they have an image as a hard man right, they bring that into the prison, a hard man. But when they go behind the door when they are locked up that's different. They can't do the time, but when they come out onto the landings they have to live up to their name.

C: Is it like a front people out on?

M: It's a front yeah.

C: And would you have had a sense of doing that yourself?

M: No I was just on my own, just carried on as normal, just doing the gym as I told you and the workshops.

C: So you weren't pretending or putting on a different face?

M: No just me normal self all throughout my sentence yeah. If people liked me they talk to me if they didn't like me they didn't talk to me. If you want to say hello I say hello if you don't I won't. As I said I just stuck with the lifers and the country lads because all the Dubs talk about drugs or they say they done this job and done that job... I don't want to listen to all that. And when you're hanging around lifers that's only in on a once off they don't talk about crime. Because they were never involved in crime.

C: So what would you talk about?

M: Well if we were in the gym we would talk about the gym that would be our buzz. I remember being the gym and there were 7 or 8 junkies there was and I said to one I get a better buzz out of the gym I says than taking drugs. They all go what? You get a better buzz from the gym that taking drugs? I remember being in the yard and feeling great after a work out for an hour and a half and then having a shower and you're going off now to pump bleeding heroin into your arms. I said what kind of a buzz is that I said. They just sit there looking at me. I was feeling healthy. I could do the splits and all. I done yoga aswell in the Training Unit for 12months. I could do the crab stand.

C: You were in good physical shape?

M: I was yeah. That's why I want to get back into it...better than sitting in the flat every afternoon.

APPENDIX F

“Peter”

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Age: | 42 |
| Age at sentencing: | 25 |
| Age upon release: | 41 |
| Year of release: | 2007 |
| Length of time served: | 15years 7months |
| Previous prison sentence: | No |
| Journey through prison system: | 1992-2000 Limerick prison 2000-2007 Training Unit |

P=Peter

C=Researcher

C: Just, I'd just like you to tell me a little bit about the prison itself and what sort of went on at the beginning kind of thing. So just were you working? Did you work or how did you pass the time?

P: I worked in the kitchen in Limerick prison, and the library, and the school.

C: You worked in the library?

P: Ah, yeah, and the school and the kitchen.

C: Ok.

Peter: And altogether, at the same time. I worked in the kitchen from say half six in the morning until nine o'clock, then I went over to the library, and I went to school, I went to the school, and the gym, of course.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So that's how I spent my time.

Clara: So it's kind of three jobs kind of thing?

Peter: Three, yeah.

Clara: And was that a conscious effort on your part?

Peter: Yeah, it was.

Clara: In order for what? In order to cope with the time in there?

Peter: Yeah, to keep my head, to keep myself sane.

Clara: To keep yourself sane, to keep yourself busy.

Peter: Yeah. I decided I wasn't going to lie around doing nothing. Otherwise I would have went insane.

Clara: How did you know that that might happen if you were not working, keeping yourself busy?

Peter: Because I've seen fellas who've been there a while when I was in on remand, and I seen what they were doing, and I said there was no way I was going down that road. I made a choice, a conscious choice, that I wasn't going to lie around all by my sentence, I wanted to get something out of it.

Clara: Ok. Because you saw sort of maybe, what, a deterioration in other people or?

Peter: Yep. I'd seen fellas who were in and out and in and out, and who spent their time in the bed, and you know, they got into drugs and they got into tablets and they got into eh**, it was just a waste of time.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And you know, they were seen then as being eejits, and they were the weak in the prison.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: I wasn't going to become one of those, you know.

Clara: So you made a conscious effort –

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: Just to keep yourself busy?

Peter: Keep myself busy, yeah.

Clara: So throughout your sentence you would have been doing that?

Peter: Yeah, from the day I went in on the sentence, I would have been doing something every day. I never done, I never spent time doing nothing.

Clara: Ok. And you found that helped then?

Peter: Very much so.

Clara: It did help?

Peter: Yeah, very much. Gave me a focus on, gave me something every day to do. You knew you were going to do something, instead of lying around, and walking around the exercise yard, or you know, staying on your back in your cell all day. I just said no way. I wasn't going down that road.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, so I used to get up early in the morning with the kitchen and do my stuff all day, so then I got locked up at half seven at night, then I was tired because I was doing something. And then I was studying at then night in the cell as well with the Open University, so I was busy busy.

Clara: You were kept very busy?

Peter: Well yeah, I suppose I didn't have enough time sometimes in prison.

Clara: You didn't –

Peter: Which was strange.

Clara: You didn't have enough time? What do you mean by that?

Peter: I didn't have enough hours in the day.

Clara: Really?

Peter: Yeah, sometimes. Because with my studies and everything, I had to get assignments out, I had to get stuff sort of studied and all that, I found that sometimes I didn't have enough hours.

Clara: So was it quite early on in your sentence you decided to study or?

Peter: Yeah, I, as soon as I got sentenced, I, I went down at a Christmas, it was near to Christmas so there was nothing happening, but as soon as the new year began, I done my Leaving Cert in History, and then I tried to do the Open University.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: But they wanted me to do my Leaving Cert first and see how I got on with studies.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: See if I could cope with it. And I did that, so then I said I was going to educate myself when I had the chance, so I said I'd do the Open University.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So, you know. And I did.

Clara: And you achieved your qualification in **?

Peter: I achieved my degree, yes.

Clara: You got your degree?

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: And did you make friends through that way or?

Peter: No.

Clara: In terms of friendships in there, what would there have been?

Peter: You won't have friendships as such; you had guys you got on with, and you hung around with.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: Then that was sentence-based as well. I hung around with a lot of lifers. So there was six or seven lifers on the one landing, and we were all together.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So we were kind of a group that we, you know. And you had status as a lifer.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: In prison. Because you don't have to worry about someone, somebody coming up to you all the time. As a lifer, there's a fear about you from other prisoners.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And maybe consciously or subconsciously you play up on that, because you know it keeps you safe.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, so and then you hang around with other lifers, you know.

Clara: And is there a sense of sort of mutual understanding with other lifers?

Peter: Very much so.

Clara: Would there be a case of that?

Peter: Yeah, we did, we all understood where we were coming from.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: Ehm, we had a lot of black humour among us.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And because of, and everyone was coping and dealing with their own issues around their crime, you know.

Clara: Yep yep yep.

Peter: And we were just a group that hung around together. And you know, I have two or three guys who are called close friends today still, that we were all together.

Clara: You would have served together?

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, from the fifteen years.

Clara: Ok. And you'd still be good friends?

Peter: Ah yeah. You know like, and hoping they get out as well and meet them up and say how is things going. But inside like, you make friends, but a lot of the time you're actually on your own. Even when you're with friends.

Clara: How do you mean? Explain that.

Peter: Prison is about yourself. Prison is about survival. You know, you do your time on your own. Nobody's going to do it for you, and you have to learn to cope during your time yourself.

Clara: I'd just be interested to see if - you hadn't had previous prison time, how did you come to the realisation that these things that ... what were the processes that got you to...?

Peter: You talk to the lifers. You talk to the guys, and you get, conversation develops, and they tell you, you know.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And you realise then yourself, well I came in the gate on my own and I'm going to walk out the gate on my own. And you know that no matter what happens in prison that you're on your own still. You know, you have to deal with your own time, every day, on a daily basis, because the prison officers ain't going to do it for you, the other prisoners ain't going to do it for you, your family ain't got the time for it, you have to actually do the time yourself. And you have to be able to realise that at beginning. If you don't realise you're on a rut,** you just will not handle prison, at any stage.

Clara: So you found you dealing with it in that way helped you cope a lot better?

Peter: Yeah, you know.

Clara: So through education and work and this sort of focus and humour –

Peter: And humour, you know.

Clara: These are the things that got you through.

Peter: Yeah. Humour, and religion, the faith.

Clara: Religion?

Peter: The faith.

Clara: What, did you have faith going in or did you develop it within there or?

Peter: I was raised an RC, and I hated RC, didn't like the RC church.

Clara: That's a Roman Catholic, yeah?

Peter: Yeah. And I spoke and I done a lot of reading on religion when I was inside. I suppose it's the old famous cliché, somebody finds God inside, but I -

Clara: Well it works for some people.

Peter: Yeah, it works for some, and I discovered Quakers.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: That's how I got involved.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: But that was my own personal faith, my own thing to deal with my own life as well.

Clara: And how did you discover them within the prison? Was there...?

Peter: I read a book. There was a book, and it was a fictional book and there was a Quaker family in it.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And I just actually didn't even know if they were real, did they actually exist, and I got my probation to check it out for me, and they were in Limerick, and I made contact, and that's how I became Quaker – and it was a faith I believed in, and I, you know, I use it a lot when my own life changes. But you know, even having said that, it was still down to the personal, a day at a time.

Clara: Yeah, there's no plans made.

Peter: No, there's no plans. You know, you go in, you get your sentence; all that was said to me was 'ok, you're doing life', the governor says to me 'come back in seven years' time and you'll have a parole board'.

Clara: That's what I was going to ask: you're not given any release date obviously –

Peter: No.

Clara: You're given life -

Peter: Yep.

Clara: You're given no indication of anything.

Peter: No.

Clara: But the governor would have said to you you're meeting the parole board in seven and a half years.

Peter: Seven years time, seven years time. Well this was a sentence ??* back then.

Clara: Oh yeah.

Peter: Go off and do your time, and come back in seven years time.

Clara: So there would have been, would there have been any input?

Peter: There was no sentence management, there was no, you know, none of that at the time, in the Irish prison system. You just went off and done your time.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, and a lot of lifers, a lot of L plates, as we call ourselves -

Clara: What do you call yourselves?

Peter: L plates. ...** You ended up doing the OU, you know.

Clara: You ended up, oh the Open University.

Peter: Because, you know, and it was something that there was a few of us doing it together and we could all help each other out. There was a few a couple of years ahead and a few starting like, so as you went through you could kind of help somebody out coming up with the OU -

Clara: Ok.

Peter: With the studies, you know. But again, at the same time, it was once that door was banged at night time, you were on your own.

Clara: So you weren't sharing a cell?

Peter: No.

Clara: You weren't sharing?

Peter: Initially I was until I got my sentence, and then I got a single to myself.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, I wouldn't, I wouldn't actually share because I couldn't handle sharing, I needed my own space.

Clara: Ok. Is there definitely a sense of that?

Peter: Oh yeah, yeah, I, you know, you need your own space I felt, especially to do with the length of time I was down. If I was doing six months, well it wouldn't matter, you wouldn't have a choice anyway, but doing an L plate, you had to get that physical, you know you'd just go insane if you were in a double room, because what would happen is if you were getting fellas in with you, and they were changing every six or seven months or something, you know, it'd just be headwrecking, they're going out and you're still there.

Clara: Ok, so you're just maybe sort of building up a bit of a relationship and they're gone.

Peter: Yeah, they're gone. So I prefer, I mean I could have, over the years I might have taken somebody in for a couple of weeks if they'd no space, but after a couple of weeks I'd want them out of there because I'd be crawling the walls.

Clara: So would that have been another way for you to cope, with your sort of space in the evening?

Peter: Yeah, yeah. It was, you know, but I like my, I liked my own privacy when the door was locked, because I was behind the door and I was doing my own thing and I could relax, listen to my music, read my books. And this was before televisions came into prisons.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, like when I started there was no televisions or anything like that in prisons.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You just had the radio.

Clara: So you just had to survive through reading and -

Peter: Reading and the radio.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: The radio in the background, but reading mainly. And you get the power of the library inside. You know, any books I could get.

Clara: Right.

Peter: You know, and you would. I was lucky I could read.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: You know.

Clara: You could read going in, yeah.

Peter: I could read, yeah, you know. So, and I mean, I suppose my attitude going in was after a while was I did, the prison officers didn't put in me in prison, I put myself in prison, so I have to deal with this in my own way, I don't want to take it off anybody else.

Clara: A sense of kind of responsibility.

Peter: Yeah, of responsibility, but I was also, but you're also angry because of the system itself. Being locked away is not natural. So you would be angry at certain things, and these certain injustices, and you just have to suck it in.

Clara: That anger, would that have been less easy to control at different sort of stages? Like is there a particular part of the sentence that would have been quite bad for you?

Peter: Well it took three years to hit me I was doing life.

Clara: Three years until it hit you?

Peter: Yeah, that's the normal routine with lifers. They told me it could take a month, it could take six years, it could take ten years; it took me, I remember three years into my sentence I woke up one morning and I came out of my cell, and the lads looked at me and said 'it's hit you, has it?' and I said 'yeah'.

Clara: When you say the lads, was it –

Peter: The other lifers.

Clara: Other lifers?

Peter: They'd been there longer than me, and they said 'it's hit you, hasn't it?' and I said 'yeah, alright', and I just went into the cell and banged out the door, and they knew what was going on. It took me a week to get it out of my head and get my head sorted out with it.

Clara: So these other L plates –

Peter: Yep.

Clara: or the lifers –

Peter: L plates, yep.

Clara: They would have gone through it themselves, so there was a real understanding there?

Peter: Yeah, there was an understanding there.

Clara: So that week for you in the cell, you don't have to go into big detail, but what was kind of going on for you?

Peter: Well I mean it was realisation that for the next ten or fifteen years maybe, or twenty years, I'm going to be doing the same thing over and over and over, as we call it, the 'goldfish in the bowl' syndrome.

Clara: When you say 'as we call it'?**

Peter: Yeah, we would always say it**, the 'goldfish in the bowl' syndrome. Ten second memory lapse because you're going round the same thing over and over and over and over, it doesn't change.

Clara: Real sense of repetition?

Peter: Yeah. You know, every day inside the same, you get unlocked, you get locked up. Nothing changes. You know, the seasons pass, the holidays pass, whatever, but there's still the same thing inside every day, you know, and that's the repetition – it can actually get to you at times. You can wake up saying 'here we go again, the same shite all day'. And you did, you know, and you'd a choice then, after that then you can either suck it up and get on with your life, or you can off the head, as some fellas just snapped and then, luck of the scheme**, the central mental hospital. You can go in on medication, and get the liquid caush.**

Clara: The liquid caush?

Peter: The medication.

Clara: Is that to sort of calm people down?

Peter: Well and people take it to cope, or you can take it a bedsheet express.

Clara: What's that?

Peter: Hang yourself.

Clara: Ok. These are the options –

Peter: These are the options that are in place, yeah.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And I made my choices. I mean I looked at what I had –

Clara: What did you call it, the what express?

Peter: The bedsheet express.

Clara: The bedsheet express.

Peter: A lot of people use bedsheets to hang themselves,

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So and it's a one-way journey.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: Again it's the dark humour of prison –

Clara: No, I understand.

Peter: Part of what we, you know, you know and, but you did have a good time with your friends admittedly. You had good craic sometimes, and you had a great gravat**, and Christmas would come around, and you know, some people would get a bit of hash, and you'd have a bit of a ball and you'd have a bit of a laugh, you know. But then there was, you were still on your own, no matter what. You know, the guy beside you who was doing life as well maybe, he was dealing with his own issues in his life. You know, I

suppose the hardest part is being locked away. You become an acceptance** being inside.

Clara: You become a what?

Peter: You become an acceptance**, that's it, you're locked up now, I hit my wall, I got over it and now I'm in prison.

Clara: That was about three years ... **

Peter: Three years. There's nothing I can do with it, I can't change it, for the heck now I'm going to do. So I just accepted, survived, and then you start getting on with it. You know, you get stuck into things, you know, you try and make yourself as busy as possible, and I actually had to force myself to stop at times and make time for myself.

Clara: Ok. You were almost too busy?

Peter: I was almost too busy.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, so I always then kind of had to say 'right now, stop' and I did. And then I got into yoga for a while.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, and music. You try all these things inside because they're there, you know, you just try it.

Clara: There was yoga within –

Peter: The prison.

Clara: Within the prison?

Peter: Yeah, and you just try it, you know. I done it for a good three or four years.

Clara: Right.

Peter: Yoga, you know. And then I was with the OU up until 2000.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So that kept me very busy.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And then I got transferred out of Limerick after my first review, and I got transferred up to the Training Unit and I was there for the remainder.

Clara: And would that have been more open conditions then? And what was that change like?

Peter: That nearly drove me insane.

Clara: The switch from the transfer?

Peter: Yeah, the six, my first six months in Training Unit were total insanity, as I call it. I couldn't –

Clara: Why, what happened?

Peter: I couldn't deal with it. I couldn't deal with no locks.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: I couldn't deal with no uniforms, I couldn't deal with no bars on the windows, I couldn't deal with being able to walk where you wanted, being up until half nine at night; it was very difficult for me at the time.

Clara: And when you say you couldn't deal with it, what?

Peter: It was hard – I'd walk to the door and stop, wait for a screw to open the door, 'what are you doing?' 'oh right', and there we ate in a dining hall, whereas I'd spent eight years eating on my own in my cell.

Clara: Oh would you?

Peter: Yeah, in the –

Clara: That's the situation in ...**?

Peter: Yeah, in the main prisons you eat in your own cell. You eat, live, sleep, everything in the cell –

Clara: Ok.

Peter: Ok?

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So in the Training Unit that wasn't like that. You know, there was no sealed doors, there was all wood doors and there was all, you know, it was totally different and I had to adjust to that, that's worse because then you have to adjust to being a prisoner as well. Because there's such a different routine. I think I stood out maybe because I was there about a week, went up the stairs in the Training Unit, and there's a cherry blossom tree and it was in full bloom and the sun was behind it, and I just stood there mesmerised, because I hadn't seen it in so long.

Clara: Yes, ok.

Peter: And I just stood there for about half an hour, looking at this thing.

Clara: Looking at this tree –

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: With the sun shining through it –

Peter: Yeah, with the sun shining through it. Because all I'd seen for eight years was a grey wall. And like to see the sky, I'd look up like that and see about that much of a sky.

Clara: Even in the yard or whatever?

Peter: Well in the yard, yeah, you'd see it, yep.

Clara: You'd get a bit of blue sky?

Peter: But you wouldn't see trees or anything like that.

Clara: Yep.

Peter: You know.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So that was a shock to the system.

Clara: Yep.

Peter: So for six months in the Unit, I was having to re-cope, I would say, to re-learn a lot of stuff, you know. So that was eight years there.

Clara: Was there a real sense of that you were changed then? Were you very aware of having changed as a person?

Peter: Yeah, I had changed majorly from when I went into prison.

Clara: You had?

Peter: I had changed an awful lot, because, if, prior to my going into prison, I was, listen, I was 25, I was immature, and drinking an awful lot, a lot of problems I hadn't dealt with. Post-conviction, I done a lot of work within the system on myself, with my probation and welfare as well.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: I done a lot of work on counselling and all that. My wish is that I had done that for my younger life, and then all that sorted out. So then when I came to the Unit, I was different again than what I was when I went into Limerick. So I –

Clara: Different -

Peter: I'd matured –

Clara: Different in a good way or?

Peter: Yeah, in a good way. I'd matured more, but I still had problems, and the six months, like for my first six months in the Training Unit were kind of

'what am I going to do here?', totally different routine, that I eventually got used to the routine. Because again now, it comes back to that I was institutionalised, from Limerick.

Clara: You had a real sense of that?

Peter: Oh yes, and that's why kind of like, I actually was institutionalised, and I think anybody in prison, whether they spend a week or a month or a year or twenty years, they will become institutionalised, because it's such a set routine. It doesn't change.

Clara: Yep.

Peter: You know, and if it does change, it upsets the whole balance.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: Because like for example if there was a match on and we were allowed out to watch the match, before we got TVs in the cells of course, that would be kind of ... before getting banged up** and your whole day, your whole evening was actually gone.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, you're ruined. You didn't know, and you were kind of, you were on edge.

Clara: Right.

Peter: So you were so used to the chopping chopping chopping, everything was chop and change, there was no chopping, everything was just set in a routine.

Clara: Yep.

Peter: And that change, that would just upset the balance of everything. You know, so that's, I mean you know I suppose for me being in prison I suppose the hardest part was family.

Clara: I was going to ask about that. Did you have family contact? Did family come and see you?

Peter: Regularly.

Clara: Regularly.

Peter: Regularly.

Clara: And how regular would that have been?

Peter: My mother was down every second week.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: My mother and father at the time were separated.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So the hard, they had to come down every second week.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So Ma'd come down this week and Da'd come down that.

Clara: Ok, so they would alternate?

Peter: Yeah, and the siblings would come down with either of them. My brothers and sisters would come down with either of them. Or then you know –

Clara: Ok.

Peter: Or they'd come down on their own.

Clara: Ok. So you would have had regular family –

Peter: Yeah regular.

Clara: And would that have been throughout the sentence?

Peter: Well it was, but then I stopped it. I kind of said 'look, do it once a month', because you get to a point like, what are you going to say?

Clara: Ok.

Peter: Ah, 'yeah I got up this morning, I emptied my pisspot, went back in' – it's the same thing, it doesn't change.

Clara: Ok. So you actually said to them –

Peter: Look, leave it, come down once a month. You know, and then when I came to Dublin I said 'look, come up when you can, when you can afford it'.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, but, because you just get over and over the routine, there's nothing to talk about.

Clara: Is there a real sense of that?

Peter: Yeah yeah, you know, 'what are you doing today?', 'same thing I was doing yesterday, same thing I was doing yesterday as last year'. It doesn't change, it's just repetitive, repeating repeating repeating repeating.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, so you kind of eventually, you don't push the family away but you cut back on the visits, that's what I did anyway, some people don't, but I just did.

Clara: Yeah, but what, you're saying that you cut back because you felt you had nothing to contribute. There's also, from what I understand, there's a sense of cutting back because it makes it easier.

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: By cutting out some of the outside world. Would you have gone through some of that?

Peter: Well I would have because I didn't want, I mean, they'd come in and tell me what was happening and all that, and that was grand, and then be telling me about problems – I don't want to know, there's nothing I can do, I'm, you know, I can't deal with any issues on the outside, I've locked away behind walls.

Clara: Is there a sense of kind of being helpless or?

Peter: Very much helpless.

Clara: Useless, kind of.

Peter: Very much so. What can you do? You're locked in a cell, there's nothing you can do about somebody who's upset down at home, or there's a family argument going on or something, you can't get involved. If you take one side, they're going to stop visiting you. You take the other side, they're going to stop visiting you. So you're kind of caught between, and then the other side, they get very, you can get 'well why aren't you visiting?'

Clara: Why aren't you visiting?

Peter: Yeah, you know and you're giving out to them. I suppose what was hard for me was I phoned my mother one night and I said 'why weren't you down?' and gave out stink over the phone. I was just upset and I left the phone and got the mail and there was a photograph after arriving with my family that they took each of them holding the thing...**

Clara: Oh, ok.

Peter: You know, a big photograph. So I had to go back and kind of 'I'm sorry'.

Clara: Ah.

Peter: So there was a lot that. And you get so kind of caught up in things. It's very, if you don't see your family for a while, you kind of say they don't care.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, they're forgetting about you. But they're not.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: You know, so** it was harder with your prison life.

Clara: Yep.

Peter: Family, you know, brothers and sisters and like my brothers and sisters grew up, my two youngest Maria and Stephen, they grew up while I was in prison.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: You know.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: And yet –

Clara: And what was that like?

Peter: But they're the closest I am to now.

Clara: Really?

Peter: Yep, you know, so they were the babies when I was in.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: Now I'm still close to all my other brothers and sisters, but they were all grown up when I was inside. And they kept going on with their lives.

Clara: I know.

Peter: You know. And fair play to them, you know. And the other side then that is you realise, your family does actually have a lot harder time than you, they have to walk in and see you and then walk away from you and leave you behind the walls, you know.

Clara: Is there a real sense of that burden?

Peter: And they have to deal with the stuff that you've left outside. They have to deal with your crime and their impact on their lives.

Clara: Would you have spoken about that or?

Peter: I, I –

Clara: Or was it a kind of unsaid thing?

Peter: No, I wouldn't have had in Limerick, and but when I got to the Training Unit I talked a bit about it, but it was only when I got out and my mother came up to see me and my sisters came up to see me and stayed over night with me that we spoke about this. A lot of stuff I didn't know about suddenly was being told to me.

Clara: From their side?

Peter: Yeah, from their side.

Clara: And what was that like?

Peter: Well it was hard because you know, you're cocooned inside of the prison as well, you're locked away from everything. And you don't realise what they had to go through as well. Not just, you're not the only one that got punished for your crime, but your family, got by, just by association, they got punished as well. You know.

Clara: Do you kind of carry, do you feel you're carrying that as well?

Peter: Yeah. Well you carry that with you and you know, you kind of think of the pain that you've caused them as well, you know. And then the media didn't help either, you know. They were very in my face for all my sentence.

Clara: For your entire sentence?

Peter: For yes, from the moment I got sentenced to the moment I, to about six months after I got released.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: It was the media.

Clara: They were still going.

Peter: Yeah. But it was the victim's family were more contacting the media the whole time, and saying you know.

Clara: Churning it up

Peter: Yeah, you know. So that was, even, there was times you couldn't open a Sunday paper, and you'd think 'oh god, the family are going to see this again now' and be thinking how are the people in the town going to react. You know, so you deal with that as well. It's not just your own –

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: Stuff.

Clara: The impact kind of on people –

Peter: Yeah, on your family.

Clara: People on the outside.

Peter: Yeah, you know. And then they down and visit you, and you make out 'everything is grand, everything is cool, everything is fine'. And it's not.

Clara: There's actually a lot of stuff kind of bubbling.

Peter: Yeah, you know.

Clara: We've spoken about family. Did you, just on family coming to visit, or friends -did you have friends come and visit you, friends from the outside?

Peter: No.

Clara: Did you then experience any relationships breaking down as a result from the outside? Any relationships broke down during your sentence?

Peter: Within the family?

Clara: Within the family then.

Peter: Well my sister and her husband broke up.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And that was a big thing. My sister couldn't handle it very well and she got very ill over it.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: I had a brother and sister born when I was inside.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: That I hadn't seen.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, because a long** – I have a son and daughter I haven't seen.

Clara: You have -

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: Children? Ok.

Peter: You know, and I haven't seen them since I got locked up. Part of a conscious choice I made.

Clara: You made that choice?

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: Right, ok.

Peter: Because I didn't want to watch them growing up behind bars.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So I let them off and live their own lives with their mothers.

Clara: Oh ok. So that particular relationship breaking down was your choice?

Peter: Yeah, you know.

Clara: Just on the release. Then, just building up towards it.

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: You said already you were seven years in, you were -

Peter: That's just my, the wind, the window's open.

Clara: Oh the window.

Peter: The wind catcher.

Clara: Oh lovely. It was seven years into your sentence before you had any contact with parole board.

Peter: The parole board, yeah.

Clara: Well, with the sentencing group at the time. And following on from that, what processes did you go through?

Peter: I got ??** each time you got to a new prison.**

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: And then I got a review again, and I got, started getting three hour.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: Building up family days out and things, and then I got outside work and time and pay.** And then I lost it all in 2002 because I went out and I screwed up.

Clara: Ok, so you had a release with a breakdown?

Peter: Yeah, I had a release, I was out, I was on TR for three days, I didn't come back for four.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And when I came in I showed positive for narcotics.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So I kind of you know, I lost everything.

Clara: So what had happened to you, just you know -

Peter: I had met this woman, I met a girl in Tesco's.

Clara: Ok. During the -

Peter: During my work programme

Clara: Ok.

Peter: During my work programme. And we arranged to meet when I was out when it was Christmas and I went back to her place and we ended up going out to a party where I was drinking punch –

Clara: Right.

Peter: That was laced with ecstasy.

Clara: Right.

Peter: And of course I was told this and I said, tell me now, I didn't care. And I went back in the next day. I was supposed to be getting out that year, and I was told I was getting nothing more for another two years because there was a change in government policy.

Clara: Say that again – you were -

Peter: I was supposed to get out then, that parole hearing was supposed to let me out, and because we had a new Minister for Justice who changed the policies -

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: I was informed the morning I was going out, which was Christmas Eve, that the results were back from your parole board, 'carry on for another two years the way you are, you're not going to be getting out'.

Clara: Two years?

Peter: Yep.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And I said 'well fuck you' and I went out the gate.

Clara: So you just left?

Peter: I just went out the gate and I was here,** as I was supposed to, for my four days, or three days. And I said well fuck it, I'll come back in a day late, at this stage I don't give a shit.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: But the other part is, going down to the party, drinking the punch wasn't part of my idea. But when I came back in, I had to give a urine, I knew it was going to be dirty ...** I had my bag on my back, I was ready to go. I said 'look, I'm not even going to argue with you'.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: 'Any stories for me?' he said, 'no stories' I said...** So I got sent back to Mountjoy for three weeks. So as a result I lost all my programme, for two and a half years.

Clara: So and did you spend that two and a half years -

Peter: In the Training Unit.

Clara: In the Training Unit then. What was that like having -**?

Peter: Initially I was very angry at myself.

Clara: For the mistake?

Peter: For being so fucking stupid.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And I was so angry at myself for a few months. I was very angry at myself. And again, it was another learning curve for me because I maybe matured a bit more, I kind of done a lot of work with the welfare, again on my decisions and my actions, and we come up with an agreement that what I was doing was that I wasn't talking about stuff that was happening, I was keeping it within myself.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So we came across a totally different new learning tools for me.

Clara: During that time?

Peter: During that time. So it was a more valuable experience for me than anything else, you know. It taught me a lot.

Clara: So there was real sense of personal development for you?

Peter: Yeah, very much so.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So that was from 2002 until 2005. And I got back out working again then from 2005 to 2007.

Clara: And then positive release in 2007?

Peter: Positive release in 2007. You know, but it was a long haul, you know. And then I began a relationship -

Clara: Yeah?

Peter: In 2005.

Clara: Whilst you were still serving?

Peter: While I was still serving -

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: With a friend that was a close friend of mine, and we ended up discovering that we had, there was more than friendship there.

Clara: Bit of chemistry, or?

Peter: Bit of chemistry there. And that was a very positive part of my last few years as well.

Clara: Was it, did that really help?

Peter: Very posi, yeah, very supportive.

Clara: Good.

Peter: You know, and Annie is very positive and supportive, you know. But it was difficult, because of I was still locked up, you know. So we, and then trying to get days out with her was a nightmare because, because of the media got pictures of us one day at the bus stop.

Clara: Ok. So even up until fairly recently the media still -

Peter: Well no, yeah, well, the last media article on me was I think around May or June or July of 2007.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And again it wasn't per se about me, it was about me but it was the victim's father who was very vocal said since the day I got lifted about me.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And but I assumed, because Annie used to come in and visit me on a Friday and we'd get the bus in together, I didn't know I was doing wrong by doing this but the Sunday World decided to take a photograph of it and splash it all over the -

Clara: Ok.

Peter: The Sunday papers, and there was a big kind of thing. Now, they didn't stop my programme inside because I'd done nothing wrong but because of that there was more on my ...**, there was more restrictions on me.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So I couldn't meet Annie when I was out, so it took us a few months, maybe a year before we'd get – and then I had to get out, because I couldn't see Annie on days out, I was under very strict conditions.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: That's worse than ...**

Clara: Ok.

Peter: So I didn't mind that.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: But it was difficult time for both of us because we had to cope with - she had to cope with the fact she was splashed all over the media, her family and everything like that. And I had to cope with the fact that I had got her splashed all over the paper. But she said 'look I knew what I was getting into when I got involved'. So, you know, that was actually very positive.

Clara: It probably helped then with the transition?

Peter: Very much so. I think if I hadn't have had Annie, and I hadn't prior to it, and I hadn't the Quakers when I was getting out, it would have been a difficult transition for me. But I had so much support around me.

Clara: The support within the community -

Peter: Within the community.

Clara: In terms of your religion –

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: And your relationship and this belief.**

Peter: Yeah, it was just very much so important.

Clara: Was, just briefly on that, when you were released, was there anything in particular like crossing roads or money or anything that you had trouble doing?

Peter: Well no, because you'd been out on a work programme for three years, I had gotten used to all that.

Clara: So you were fairly sort of ready?

Peter: Yeah, but initially, my first TR out was ten years, after ten years and that was a shock to the system – colours, sounds, smells, mobile phones.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: ...** because I hadn't experienced them.

Clara: Of course, yeah.

Peter: People walking round with mobiles and, and I was walking up Grafton Street with a friend, and I just said 'look, get me off the street', I couldn't handle it.

Clara: The numbers of people?

Peter: The numbers of people and the noise and the smells and the, everything. 'Get me off', so we went into Bewley's for a cup of coffee and sit down and just relax. You know, it's so difficult. But then as my TR progressed and I got used to everything again -

Clara: Do you think that sort of that process does help?

Peter: It does, yeah.

Clara: It does help?

Peter: Oh yeah.

Clara: For people going through?

Peter: Majorly.

Clara: Is there any support within the prison then for say if you go out on a day release, on your first one, when you go back to the prison that evening, is there any support -

Peter: No.

Clara: Within the? No prison officer, no ...**?

Peter: Oh no, 'you're back on time, good luck, go on, back on to your cell'.

Clara: Ok. So who would you have discussed that with, or any difficulties you would have had? Or was it a case of processing it yourself?

Peter: Processing it yourself more than anything else.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know because you see your welfare maybe a week or two later, 'how did that go for you?', 'ah, it was grand'.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: And you're going to say it went well, you're not going to say 'I couldn't stand it', because you'd be afraid you won't get another one.

Clara: I understand.

Peter: So you're going to say 'yeah, it went fantastic'.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: And then you've to process it yourself. Like I mean I walked into a shop the first time and said 'give me twenty straights'.**

Clara: Right.

Peter: And your one went – 'Twenty John Player Blue'. You're so used to the prison lingo.

Clara: Of course, yeah.

Peter: You know.

Clara: Of course.

Peter: You know, and then when you're talking, then when you're out working on the programmes and you're like, and you're meeting people who don't know where you're from, you're watching your language.

Clara: Is it a sense that you've picked up kind of prison lingo?

Peter: Oh yeah, like I mean, I was out with the lads, I was out, you have to be careful what you're saying. And then you become a liar.

Clara: How do you mean?

Peter: You have to make up stories.

Clara: About where you've been?

Peter: Yeah, like 'I was on a surf course' and on a Friday or a Sunday if they ask you to go for a drink, I couldn't, so what did I say, I had to make up lies.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: 'Ah no, I'm heading home from the weekend', or you know and, 'where are you heading?', 'oh I'm living in the North Circular Road', now you wouldn't be in prison, but you would, you could say the North Circular because you could be living in the flats up there. So you become very, so you had to make up stories about who you were.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, it was horrible.

Clara: Yeah, you really feel that you were lying to people?

Peter: Yeah. And you were. You know, but it's not, I suppose it's protecting yourself as well, you know. Because you don't know how people are going to react and -

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: Where you're from or everything, you know.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: So I suppose that's the difficulty, but free release it's important, you build up the getting used to all this stuff again, you know.

Clara: And you more or less, it sounds that you more or less do that yourself even though the prison -

Peter: Yeah

Clara: Sets up release -

Peter: Oh yeah.

Clara: For the weekend?

Peter: You do it yourself.

Clara: You actually do?

Peter: You actually do. I mean, they're not going to do it for you, they're not going to go into a shop and buy you twenty cigarettes. You have to go in yourself and do it, and you have to get used to getting your money out, and I suppose because the money had changed from the punt to the euro, you know, you were getting used to the new euros, and -

Clara: Yep.

Peter: And traffic was major, problem.

Clara: Traffic?

Peter: Yeah, oh yeah, zoom.

Clara: Volumes of traffic?

Peter: Yeah, you know, like even today, I'd stand and wait for a green man. There could be no traffic on the road, but I would wait for a green man to come before I'd cross that road, because I'm just so focused on, you know.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: And you know, it's things like that, and I mean, culture changes, music changes, fashions change, and you're walking out into all of that. You know, and you're just going 'wow'.

Clara: There really is a sense of being out of touch.

Peter: Totally. Totally.

Clara: Even with televisions and cameras?

Peter: Well they say, we say, they say when go inside, I went in when I was 25, I was 25 when I came out.

Clara: You felt the same age when -?

Peter: Yeah, your life stops at 25. I'm 42 but I'm still 25.

Clara: Kind of put on ice?

Peter: Yeah, like when I first met my sisters and everything after so many years, you know what I mean, on the outside, you still think of them as when you went in. But they're not, they're so different.

Clara: They've had twenty five years of -

Peter: Fifteen years of changing their lives.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: You know. Like my younger sister came up, and she was with her own baby, and kind of 'wow'. But you're still focused on when you came into prison.

Clara: So once you're, even though you would have had family visits and stuff like that, is there a real sense of change when you're released ...**?

Peter: Oh yeah, major change, major change on release.

Clara: There is?

Peter: Yeah, no, yeah because they're all grown up, and they've got their own families and their own lives and when you're with your family they're talking, you're talking about people from your area, and you don't know them, you haven't met these people in so long, you haven't been in your home town in so long, you don't know what they're talking about. So you're kind of, I suppose you're estranged to a certain point with them, you know, and then they're talking about 'do you remember when you did this', and you're 'I'm not dead!', you know.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: I've been in prison, but I'm not dead! Somebody talking about like 'do you remember when such-and-such Tony done that'. It's like you're outside from their lives.

Clara: Is that how it seems in their communication with each other kind of thing?

Peter: No, they do be talking about, when they're all talking at home like, 'oh we were talking about you last night, and saying Tony did this', and I said 'yeah, but I'm not dead', or as I was saying, 'I've only been in prison lads, for fifteen years, not in a coma'. So, you know, you try to get them to talk about things, like you know, 'yeah, that was fifteen years ago, this is now, but I'm still around'.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: But then you're not, because you haven't been part of the family for so long.

Clara: And they would have found their own ways of kind of coping -

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: With you not being there?

Peter: Exactly, yeah, and you just live - and now at this stage I'm out eight months now and I've my own life.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: Which is different to their lives.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: You know.

Clara: But you still have family contacts or?

Peter: Oh yeah. Sure, I've sisters up the whole time, and I've family up the whole time, you know. I've banned them all until autumn anyways.

Clara: You did what?

Peter: I've banned them all until autumn. We needed enough time, I said.** I said 'no more visits, until September, October'.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: You know, because, I mean, they kind of forget then that you're trying to deal with release. You know, and it's only eight months out, so it's a long, you know, time.

Clara: You're out only eight months at this stage.

Peter: Thank God, you know.

Clara: Do you still feel that you've some work to do?

Peter: Oh yeah. It's not even about work, it's about just learning to live life again.

Clara: Is there a real sense of that, learning again?

Peter: Yeah. You know, sometimes something hits you, you're walking down the street and you're going 'oh I don't have to go back into prison'.

Clara: What's that like?

Peter: It's, generally it stops you in your tracks. Honest, often I'd be walking home from the cinema on a night there, and I'd stop and say 'I've just been to the cinema', and there's such a strange thing. I walked home from Darndale one night with a bag of chips there a couple of weeks ago, walking from Darndale to here with a bag of chips and a sausage and eating it, and I was going - you know, it just hits you.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: I'm doing what people do every day. I'm actually doing it. And it just hit me coming up the road. You know, so little things will hit you. Every so often it just hits you.

Clara: Would it hit you in a more positive way than maybe -

Peter: Yeah, oh yeah.

Clara: How the boundaries hit you?**

Peter: No no, it's a positive 'wow', you know.**

Clara: It feels good?

Peter: Seriously good. I mean, I'm free, the sun is shining, you know -

Clara: Walking along with my bag of chips.

Peter: Bag of chips and something to drink that you hadn't had in so long.

Clara: Yep.

Peter: You know, and you're going, and it's just lovely.

Clara: Yep.

Peter: You know. But then you have to work, and you have to earn a living, and you have to live your life again.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: So all them, I suppose the normal every day stresses and pressures that people come under, you're now coming under them.

Clara: You're under them as well.

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: On top of the other issues?

Peter: On top of dealing with your transition from prison to society, or whatever way you want to put. To real life.

Clara: The free community.

Peter: The free community.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: I like that – the free community, you know.

Clara: That's, I'm looking at, I'm just looking at sort of what happens during the sentence and then around release and I'm hoping I've asked everything but is there anything you think -

Peter: Well -

Clara: That I haven't covered?

Peter: I mean -

Clara: I'm sure there is -

Peter: Yeah well –

Clara: ...**

Peter: Prison is about fear. Because you're afraid, you're afraid in prison – it's a violent place, it's a dark place, it's full of pain and hurt and anger and, right, prison is about loneliness, you're very lonely even if you're locked up with a hundred, two hundred fellas – prison is about boredom, you know, you know, and I mean, I mean I think I suppose for me, I have a thing in my diary there that can cover, and I read ahead and back, and I could tell you it was wonderful. And that's the ...** thing.

Clara: Is there a real sense of survival, is there?

Peter: Big time.

Clara: Is that what it feels like?

Peter: Yeah...** My mother spent about I think fifteen and a half years waiting for a knock on the door saying I'd hung myself or something in prison.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: You know.

Clara: So she would fear for how you were coping?

Peter: She was fearful. And it is a very fearful place, you're terrified. I was initially, for my first two weeks on remand, I was terrified. After two weeks, you just adapt

Clara: But it is a scary kind of environment?

Peter: It is a scary environment. Because something can happen at the click of a fingers. You don't know what's going to happen, what's going to go down. It's violent, it's anger, it's drugs, it's, you know, people are frustrated because they don't know how to do, cope with anything. And when you go into prison, because I'd never been in before this, you have the Hollywood image of prison.

Clara: In what way? What do you mean by that?

Peter: What you see on television now in prisons, 'Borstal Boy's and all this, and you have this image of 'oh god', like you know, and then you realise 'oh hang on, it's nothing fucking like that'.

Clara: As in it's a bit better or?

Peter: It's a bit better.

Clara: If you can handle it?

Peter: If you can handle it, you know what I mean. And you know I suppose you have with the showers and all this kind of stuff, but as I always said, Ireland's are the most homophobic prisons in the world. It doesn't happen.

Clara: Right.

Peter: It doesn't happen -

Clara: Right.

Peter: Because you'd end up getting killed over it. So, but there is still, you still don't know, if somebody gets a bad visit or a bad letter, and they'll come out and take it out on somebody.

Clara: Isn't there a real sense of, because everyone's so close together -

Peter: Yeah?

Clara: If someone who's got an issue or a particular group run a landing, that's going to, would that affect everybody?

Peter: Oh yeah, you know, like you can feel the tension, you know when the tension is there.

Clara: Ok.

Peter: Like and then something could blow at any second. And that's what prison is about. I mean prison is, prison is a community within a community.

Clara: Of course, yeah.

Peter: And if, it can have all the ills of society contained in a very small area.

Clara: Yeah, locked in.

Peter: Locked in. So there's mental health issues, there's drugs issues, there's ? issues -

Clara: Race.

Peter: There's racism. There's, you know, fear -

Clara: Crime.

Peter: Crime. And there's you know, and then the staff, prison officers, you know, there's aggro there as well – you get the good, the bad and the ugly. If you're dealing with that on a daily basis -

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: You know. And it's up to you to cope with that, to deal with that as best as you can. If you can't deal with it, you sink.

Clara: So now like, now you've managed, you know, what does that feel like then? Is there a real sense of achievement or?

Peter: I think being in jail is a motivator.**

Clara: So it is a –

Peter: Oh yeah.

Clara: A sort of kind of -

Peter: It's a survival. I survived fifteen and a half years in prison, and my God how did I do that. Like you know, if you had said to me fifteen years ago, sixteen years ago 'you're going to go off and spend the next fifteen years of your life in prison', 'give me a rope', there's no way I would do it. But like people say to me how can you do it ...** The thing about it is when you're in there, you do it. You've no choice. You have to. You know, and I just found I had to. The sad thing about it is I've learnt more and changed my life more for the fifteen and a half years I was inside than I did for the twenty five years I was outside before I went in.

Clara: But you were very young.

Peter: I was very young, I had a lot of issues, a lot of problems. But I grew up a lot more -

Clara: Within the -

Peter: Within the system. My mother and father thought I got cold and hard and stuff. And I said, 'no I just grown up then'. It's that kind of thing you have to do.

Clara: So there was more of a sense for you of a positive kind of? Do you feel like a better -

Peter: Yeah, it's a paradox when I say that, you know, it's not lightening, it's not dismissing my crime or that -

Clara: Yep, no -

Peter: That was an important aspect of -**

Clara: I understand that -

Peter: But yet it was a positive for me -

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: It was very much a positive for me.

Clara: It probably sounds to me like a conscious effort on your part to make it positive -

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: Or you were going to go back out the same person.

Peter: Or I would never have got out.

Clara: Or you would have hurt yourself.

Peter: Or yeah, I would have took, or I would have killed myself.

Clara: So you made a conscious effort -

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: 'I have to make this time -

Peter: Yeah, I have to do something while I'm in here.

Clara: Worthwhile'.

Peter: I can't give up. I've hit rock bottom. There's no place I can go after this.

Clara: Is there a real sense of that?

Peter: Oh yeah. You look at them fucking four walls, and you look at -

Clara: It's just like -

Peter: It's just oh, you know, and you know again it's the mind will have to deal with all of that, you know and how strong you are within your mind as well.

Clara: Well you must be very strong.

Peter: I didn't think I was. I honest to God didn't think I was. And sometimes I sit back and I think about it, 'Jesus, I spent fifteen and a half years in all that' you know -

Clara: And you came out.

Peter: And came out actually a lot better than I went in. You know, I mean they say that after five years you have psychological damage, because of that** and well if I have -

Clara: When you say they, is that other life-sentenced prisoners?

Peter: No, that's what the medical, the medics, the -

Clara: The medics.

Peter: Profession will tell you. So as I said, well if I have it, jaysus, it must be a different kind for me. You know, and I did have my down days, I did have

days when I was looking up at the window thinking 'I don't want to do this any more'.

Clara: Would you have ever hurt yourself?

Peter: No.

Clara: No.

Peter: No. Never. Not prior to prison.

Clara: Right.

Peter: Or not –

Clara: Not during –

Peter: Not during the sentence. But prior to prison, when I had ...* drink and that, I used to self-harm.

Clara: You used to.

Peter: Yeah.

Clara: But you didn't bring that into the prison.

Peter: I stopped all that. Why, I don't know.

Clara: That's an unusual transition.

Peter: Yeah, transition. I stopped everything.

Clara: You would have been a very high risk category then?

Peter: Very much so.

Clara: Of suicide and self-harm.

Peter: And I didn't. But the other side of that is I always self-harmed when I was drunk.

Clara: Right, so your problems were very drink-related.

Peter: Yes, and they were drink-related because of the issues I had. But then I dealt with all them issues and then just you know, I haven't touched alcohol since.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: And that's a conscious choice.

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: You know what I mean, I don't go to AA, I don't depend on AA or anything like that because I don't feel that I need it, because I wasn't like a person ...** Not drinking. I made a choice, I'm not going to drink. That's my conscious choice. You know, as I said, the last time I had a drink was the first of April 1992 and I woke up in a cop station charged with a murder. So.

Clara: So.

Peter: It's a very sobering -

Clara: Yeah.

Peter: Thing.

Clara: Yep.

Peter: You know. You know, that's why I'm not saying I won't drink down the line, if in two years time you want to have a social drink, and I said that over the years when I was dealing with probation and that, I said 'that's not saying I won't have a drink'.

Clara: But right now –

Peter: Right now, it's a conscious decision not to.

Clara: Right. So any other thoughts? On life-sentencing? Or yourself?

Peter: Not so many. Is that any good to you?

Clara: You've given me an amazing amount of food for thought.

APPENDIX G

“Karl”

| | |
|---|--|
| Age: | 55 |
| Age at sentencing: | 34 |
| Age upon release: | 50 |
| Year of release: | 2003 |
| Length of time served in prison: | 16years |
| Journey through prison system: | Mountjoy 13years Training Unit 3years |
| Previous prison sentence: | No. |

K = Karl

C = researcher

C: First of all I would like to hear from you about your experience of the prison environment from when you went in and what you may have felt about it at first.

K: Well first impressions is very frightening do you know what I mean. Your first time in an environment where there is no prospect of early release, you are going to be here for years. Trying to get used to that. Taken away from your family erm... sort of takes the guts out of you. The first night was a nightmare, I didn't sleep at all. Er... the surroundings, seeing people you have never seen before in your life.

C: A sense of having strangers around you?

K: Strangers around you. And not knowing what to expect from them and all coming from all different backgrounds and some well-to-do, some ordinary folk. And then I suppose having to adjust to all that – it took me 2years to get any understanding whatsoever about it you know what I mean? To adjust to that type of regime. Because everything is taken away from you you don't have any control you're told what time to get up in the morning, you're told what time to go to the toilet; you're told what time to have your meals at. You don't have choices you're a prisoner. And you're a number and that's all you are a number.

C: Would you have had a real sense of that, being a number?

K: Oh yeah, your liberty has been stripped off you you know, and you don't have choices that's it. For me to get that around my head took me about 2years, that I had no control whatsoever.

C: And during this time did you speak with anyone, other prisoners or was there any support from prison staff around that period for you?

K: No not really, no. I have to say, when I went into jail in 1988, there was very, very little support for anybody. There is now. I didn't get any support. I didn't see a Probation Officer for nearly 4years. No body ever came to me and sat me down and says lookit you're doing a life sentence and this is how it works. The Governor would have told me alright.

C: The Governor would have spoken to you?

K: Oh yeah, he would have spoken to me the following day after I come in like. I came in at night time so I seen him the following morning and he laid down the rules and told me to get my head down and keep my mouth

shut, you know. Go to school, go to work, whatever's available he says. Use the availability of what's around – if you get into trouble you are just going to prolong your sentence. Put your head to the ground and do as I say not as I do, you know. That was basically it.

C: So in terms of that, did you work or what did you do?

K: I went to school. I hadn't any education whatsoever, I only had a primary certificate, which is the equivalent of the Junior Certificate today, that's all that's the only education I had and I got that back in the '60's. So I got me head down and went to school.

C: At what stage did you go to school?

K: Oh I would say about 3 years before I got around to doing that.

C: OK so you got involved in schooling.

K: Yeah and then I worked in the fabric shop making the remand jeans, I worked down there, erm... then I got onto the trades. Painting was me trade. It takes you years to get into the trades. You have to gain their trust you know.

C: When you say get onto the trades, what does that mean?

K: Trades means it's a step forward that you, you sort of becoming a model prisoner then, you're more trusted because you could be out all day. Out of your cell. And you'd actually eat in the kitchen – that's one of the perks of being on the trades you actually get to eat in the kitchens with the rest of the staff, sort of with the officer over you.

C: And this would have been earned?

K: Oh yeah. It took me 6 years to get that. I took me Junior Cert, my Leaving Cert, I did me English Leaving Cert and History, then I done my higher level English, I did the Leaving Cert English then I done the higher level English, I done a Philosophy course, and then I done sociology for a year.

C: Right OK.

K: That's what brought me up to about 6th year and that's when I applied through the Governor to apply to go on to the trades, my father was a painter decorator, that's what I wanted to do. And took me a couple of months, I got it, and basically erm... things started to fit in I just erm. Me father died in the mean time – he died in '98.

C: You had served 10 years at that stage?

K: Yeah. He died in '98 I got out to his funeral; I was escorted to his funeral. It was a hard time for me ma when he died and with me locked up and erm... it was hard for us all. I had been separated in '86, my daughter was very young. So erm... [daughter] got engaged in '97. And I have 3 lovely grand kids today, [gives names].

C: Congratulations.

K: They're the ones that keep me going today. You know what I mean?

C: Through your sentence, how would you say you sort of managed to keep... you said that for the first 2 years it was hard, how did you get yourself through that?

K: It was hard for the first 2 years yeah. I didn't think I was going to make at that time. I thought the pressure was going to get to me. Big time. I really believed that yeah.

C: So what clicked for you? What changed for you after that 2 years?

K: Erm... I suppose erm, a fella called [provides name], he was a psychologist. I went to see him on a one-to-one. Which was very rare you only seen him once a month. But erm...the time I spent with him, I worked with him for about 2years. I think it was him who got me to believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel. You don't see it now, it's too early for you to see it now...

C: But guys do make it...

K: Guys do make it, yeah. There is light at the end of the tunnel. I couldn't see it no. I wasn't talking to anybody about it you know; I was bottling it up and...

C: So what about other life sentence prisoners, would you have spoken with them?

K: I would have spoken with them but they were, they ... I think life sentence prisoners go their own route you know. They don't sort of sit down and talk about what do you think? How long do you think you are going to serve? They just seem to go into another dimension, they go into their own inner feelings and they deal with what they are going to deal with, they can't... they don't want to talk about it.

C: So would you say that through working and going to college and going onto the trades, would that have really helped?

K: Yep. Oh yeah. Because I seen people go... actually going insane and that was because they weren't doing anything with themselves. They were walking around the yard for 2hours in the morning, 2hours in the afternoon, day in day out – that can't be good for you, your inner soul you know.

C: You would have seen a kind of a deterioration?

K: Yep. I seen prisoners deteriorate, I seen people commit suicide in prison. I didn't see them obviously, but I would have heard about it the next morning. And all fairly young, all 20 to 30.

C: In your opinion that would have been people who could not cope?

K: Couldn't cope no. Didn't get, didn't plan their day, didn't plan the week or... just let it saunter on, just got into them and just couldn't cope. I seen people turn to drugs who thought that was the answer to it.

C: Would that give a feeling of fear to the person witnessing it? Would you have thought I don't want to end up like that?

K: Oh yeah. It's a wake up call yeah. To get focused and make the best of a bad situation. That's what you have to do. You have to be strong minded in prison. Even today like, all the things have changed since when I went into prison. There's more, more help for prisoners today, that they don't have to do this on their own, there is help out there. Agencies that come in and give lectures and give one-to-ones and all that. It took a long time for the Department of Justice to see that you can't just be throwing people into cells and... you know. Prison is one thing, but then just to... not to give them the help that they need to survive in prison, you've got to give them the tools to survive in prison. That means talking to people because if you don't talk to a person, if the person doesn't want to change he just, just do something rather stupid, you know, or he go onto the wrong track. He goes for drugs or whatever. I seen prisoners come in never took a drug in their whole life and then get out addicts.

C: What about in terms of your own experience, would have gone down the route or drugs in prison?

K: Oh yeah, I smoked cannabis yeah. I never touched hard drugs now, never took heroin or cocaine or anything like that.

C: Would that have been a regular thing?

K: No it wouldn't be a regular thing, just a relaxer over the week end.

C: And from your experience of life sentence prisoners, would they tend to dabble with hash but tend not to use harder drugs?

K: Probably yeah, yeah. Moistly yeah, because they know they have too much to lose you know. If they went down the road of the hard drugs that would be too much of an addiction to kick.

C: And is there a real sense of that amongst life sentence prisoners that behaving well and serving your time is the best way to go?

K: Yeah. Lifers discipline themselves. They discipline themselves to a sense that they know they can't, you're being watched, you're on license and when you get out you're on license. That sense is there all the time; lifers have to know that you know. You just have to discipline yourself you know. It's like they say jump and you say how high. Giving them back cheek or anything like that it's a black mark it is. And then when you come up for a parole hearing it's all written down, you're looking for something, do you not remember back in 19 so and so and so, the cheek you gave the officer you see. In other words there's a difference between a prisoner who has a release date and a life sentence prisoner, he doesn't have a release date.

C: You have to earn your release.

K: You have to earn your release. They tell you when they think you are ready to go. If you feel that you are ready, that you've achieved as much as you can achieve, there's no guarantees. I could be still in there by right. I could be still in there. Just because I thought I was ready to go in 2003 doesn't mean they think I am ready to go. It's when they say you are ready to go. Not when you say. Even you are the one doing the time. You're the one who has put in all the effort and hard work into to get where you are, but at the end of the day if they don't think you are ready.

C: It's almost as fragile as that, a real sense that...

K: Did you ever see the Shawshank Redemption did you? Where Morgan Freeman's 3time at the Parole Board, and at the end of the day he couldn't care less and that was the time they released him. They rejected him the first tow times. Rejection, rejection. And when he threw the towel in that's when they release him.

C: Do you think it's a game? Or what do you think is going on?

K: It could be. It could be head games. To see how far they can push you. How far they can test you and see if you are going to snap. What if they release a guy and he's scared stiff outside and he starts a job or something and someone puts it up to him, what if he snaps? Is he going to kill that person is he?

C: You were talking there about family; I just want to ask you about contact with the outside. Did you maintain regular contact with the outside?

K: Oh yeah. My family were most important to me yeah.

C: They would have come and visited you?

K: Oh yeah, every week yeah. My mam used to visit every month.

C: And who else would come up and see you?

K: Brothers.

C: Throughout your sentence?

K: Throughout the sentence yeah. There was always somebody came up. They would arrange it between themselves, who's going to come up this week.

C: OK. And how did you find that?

K: I found it great because that means I wasn't bogged down with the one and wouldn't know what to be talking about because sometimes you'd be on a visit and you don't know, they don't know what to be saying to you. What's it like in there? You know. You're in a cell, you know what I mean? So they get bogged down they don't know what to be saying. So then we would start talking about how they're doing and that used to suit me great. Like I done this today and we went on holidays there and we done this today and I was up with your ma last week and did up the house for her. You know. They didn't want to be talking about how do you be doing in there. They knew quite well that you know what I mean. He doesn't want to hear this, you know, he knows what he has to face when he goes back in there. So there is no point in asking how is he doing. We can see that he is alive and he's smiling and that's, he's coping the best way he can in other words.

C: You enjoyed the time listening to what was going on?

K: Yeah. To talk about the outside rather than talk about what was going on on the inside. Unless something came up, if there was something that came up or something in the prison you know. It's very rare that you would get something like that happen you know. But if it did come up I would say it to them you know.

C: You say that rarely that would come up?

K: Very rarely. It's down to discipline you know what I mean? There were a few altercations, you can't go through 16years of jail and not run into someone when you're having a bad day or he's having a bad day or something but never any digging matches or anything. I was very lucky in that... I never had a P19* or anything. I was never put on report.

C: You really did manage to discipline yourself?

K: Yeah.

Pause

C: You said you had children, just briefly, you had children starting your sentence, and how many children did you have?

K: Just one my daughter.

C: Would you have maintained contact with her?

K: Yeah, she was up fairly regularly. She used to come up in her school uniform.

C: OK. Can I just ask, I don't want to upset you...

K: Yeah, go on.

C: I just want to ask, how that was for you her coming up. What it was like for you.

* Prison disciplinary procedure.

K: I didn't like her coming up when she was in school you know. I didn't want her coming up but she wanted to do it. I didn't want her coming up so young you know. And to face all that and to grow up in that. Because I was afraid that if her friends in school were talking about why I was in jail and started name calling. Bullying her you know. I know she can stand up for herself, she's very strong willed person but I didn't want her to go down that road. But what could I do? She wanted to come up and what could I say?

C: And she maintained those visits?

K: She maintained that all the way through to the day I got released yeah. She went through school and she done well for herself, she got her diplomas and she teaches computers now. That's what she does now.

C: So I suppose it is fair to say that your worries about her father being in prison and the impact of that did not have a negative effect on her...

K: No. Seemingly not no. Seemingly she was tough. Her ma always says I think she takes after you she says, disciplined and strong willed. Whatever she sets out to do she won't stop until she fulfills what she wants to do.

C: She is focused?

K: Yeah. She won't let anything deter her.

C: She wanted to come to visit you?

K: Yeah. That was it. I'm coming up anyway. Whether you like it or don't like it, I'm coming.

C: That's good to hear that she came up to you...

K: Cos I've seen it a lot families just disconnected from prisoners.

C: Would you say that was common amongst life-sentence prisoners you met or?

K: No not basically life sentence prisoners, no. Just ordinary sentenced prisoners with families who have just disconnected. Maybe they have had enough you know. In and out of prison for all their life you know and just say enough is enough you know what I mean. I'm just not going up there anymore; I'm not supporting you anymore. Because every time he goes into prison her just goes back again. He will get out and just do the same thing all over again.

C: Whereas for life sentence prisoners, this is often their first time in jail?

K: Yeah. The chances of life sentence prisoners re-offending is very very slim.

C: Why do you think that is?

K: It's a lot to do with fear aswell. You know what I mean? If you come back in you could be back in for years, you know. That if he did re-offend you know.

Pause

C: Around your sentence, did you notice any positive or negative changes in you; say from the beginning of your sentence the end? Did you have a sense of having changed at all?

K: Oh yeah, changed I changed a lot.

C: In what ways?

K: Erm, me thinking...when I was outside me thinking was off the wall at times you know, I wasn't a constructive thinker. I didn't plan anything, it was

always in slow motion...I'd let things slip, I just wouldn't concentrate you know. But when I was in prison and I entered into the discipline of what this is about and when it was laid down to me on the line... kind of this is where you are at and if you step out of line you know what the consequences are. And it sort of, I lived with that fear every day until I got released.

C: A fear of the consequences of stepping out of line?

K: A fear of the consequences.

C: Would you say that discipline instilled something positive in you?

K: Yeah. Because I am more positive today. I plan everyday what I want to do. Even though when I was on a CE Scheme* when I got out that was 3 ½ years erm and me 3 ½ years was up in January if that had been sort of 20 odd years ago I probably would have flipped there, probably would have probably lashed out at somebody at someone you know. But today I can take it you know. I can take the simple things. I can keep going down to FAS^Y and keep checking for work you know what I mean. Everyday of the week.

C: Would you say you are less reactive?

K: Less reactive yeah. And because prison made me like that, you have to think before you act. You have to think before you act. You can't lash out you know.

C: And you see that as a positive change?

K: Oh yeah, that was a positive change for me.

Pause

C: With the move between Mountjoy and the Training Unit, from closed conditions to more open conditions, what was that like?

K: Yeah, the Training unit was a big eye opener for me now. The transfer over to the Training Unit was a big one because they gave me the input to communicate with prisoners on a daily basis which meant eating with these prisoners now, whereas I used to be eating in my cell in Mountjoy.

C: What was that like?

K: That was huge.

C: In a positive way?

K: Yeah. Like being in a canteen working in a canteen and eating with your fellow worker you know. Sitting down at a table, humanly, you know. Eating off plates, not plastic plates or plastic forks, real knives and real forks. And chatting. And then when your dinner's over you could go for a walk. Things like that. You didn't get that in the 'Joy. Because your dinner and then you're locked up for 2hours. Then you went out for another 2hours and then back in again for your tea.

C: You found that a real positive thing?

K: Yeah. Drinking out of cups and mugs and all of that.

C: You said about human contact, was there a sense of being human again?

* Community Employment Scheme.

^Y Job Centre.

K: Yeah. Cos it's all isolation. You're living on your own; you're in your own cell. Whatever you're communicating for the few hours you're out [on recreation], but you're locked up 18 out of 24, you're only out for 6 hours a day in Mountjoy that's all you're out.

C: There's a lot of time by yourself?

K: 2 hours [with other people] in the mornings, 2 in the afternoons and 2 at night. And the rest of your day in the cell, it's a long time. You didn't get that in the Training Unit you were out all the time.

C: So what was that like to have so many people around you?

K: Oh it took me ages to get used to this. It took me ages to get used to that being out so long. That you didn't get locked up at all.

C: How long would you say?

K: Jesus, 6 or 7 months.

C: 6 or 7 months to get used to it. And what would happen would you tend to withdraw?

K: No I just couldn't believe it the transformation between a main jail and a semi open jail. No bars on the windows you know. Beautiful scenery and flowers and gardens and better work shops and you know...

C: Was there a visual experience then? Because you are seeing things you have not seen in a while...

K: It's just different. The visiting box is even different and visiting people. You're not sitting there with 10 or 12 people listening to your conversation – you're in a visiting box on your own. There's a camera in there but who cares about the camera? – the door is closed over and you can talk about what you want to talk about. That was completely different to the regime that I had for nearly 13 years, you know.

Pause

C: And would you have had some support building up toward your release, would you have had Temporary Release or how did that work for you?

K: Yeah, it started off with days then it went to over nights then weekends.

C: And what was that like the transfer going back into the community?

K: Oh that was big. The first time ever was with a priest. It was mad I couldn't believe it.

C: In a good way?

K: Oh yeah, great. A great feeling yeah. But strange at the same time. Cars... I hadn't seen cars in years you know. Buses. Standing on O'Connell Street... to think that I thought back in '88 that I would never see O'Connell Street again, which I really believed, you really believe that when you go in there first. It's just doom and gloom, you know it's... life means life, at the start you actually believe that. It took me 2 years anyway.

C: To actually believe that you would get out?

K: Yeah to actually believe, with the help of the psychologist. He made me believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

C: So when you did get out...

K: So when I did get out, [the psychologist] was right. It's just... it's erm, a humdinger of a sentence, life, it's a humdinger. But erm, they say only the

strong survive you know what I mean? It's about being strong and it's about will power, it's about discipline.

C: Is there a sense, would you say, of survival?

K: Yeah.

C: Having achieved it, is it a case of looking back and thinking I survived that?

K: Oh yeah, yeah.

C: And would that give you a good feeling?

K: Sometimes when I'm out I get a shutter up me spine thinking of the years, and if you put that into hours, it's frightening, the number of hours, frightening. You know.

C: So is it more a case of trying to forget it or put it into a box?

K: Well that's what I try to do. I try to put it into the Pandora's Box and keep it there. But well you know, when [...] asked me to do this I said yeah. If it helps the girl in college. But I wouldn't be erm...I wouldn't give myself to the newspapers or sell it to an author or anything like that. It's my experience and this to me would be a one off do you know what I mean? But I wouldn't like to be talking about it daily or every month. Just put it away now, it's done and dusted now, you know. Just get on with your life.

Pause

C: Just to go back a little bit, I just want to check times with you; you met with the psychologist 2years into your sentence?

K: Yeah.

C: And you didn't meet a Probation Officer until 4years into your sentence?

K: That's right, yeah.

C: And would Probation have been building you up towards your meeting with the Parole Board or the Sentence Review Group?

K: The Sentence Review Group, my first meeting was in '95 that was my first one. I was 7years in. They out me back for 3years.

C: Then after 3years I seen them again in '98, the year me father died, '98 and then 2000, they split up in '99, so the Parole Board in 2000. I seen the Parole Board in 2002 and they released me in 2003.

Pause

C: In terms of getting back in touch with your family and being in the community again upon your release, what was that like?

K: It was difficult at the start. It is because you set yourself up into a regime and you know, you sort of planned your day and now you have the freedom to walk out the door and close your door and go for walks or whatever.

C: So it took some time to get used to that?

K: Yeah, yeah, it took me er... it took me a while. I couldn't actually pinpoint it now to a time but it took me a while.

C: What kind of supports would you have had then?

K: I went into therapy.

C: Psychotherapy?

K: Yeah and I just told him where I was at. And he said he should be bale to help.

C: And did that help?

K: Yeah it did it helped a great deal. He said that's erm, you spend that much time in prison he said, that can change people. It takes time to adjust. And he did the right thing by coming to us and talking about it you know.

C: So the therapist approached you and offered some help?

K: Yeah. He said it's a good thing. Because it's not easy to adjust like that. I seen fellas do 6months and need help. 16years is a long time. It's over a decade and a half.

Pause

K: So it wasn't that easy to adjust you know. But you know, time and patience and [daughter] is very good to me you know. She was very, very good, no pressure...

C: And the grand children aswell?

K: Yeah. They are great yeah. Playing with them in the play ground and bringing them to the park. Playing to heal the wounds you know. Kids make you young again and they sort of... I used to forget about where I was and I forgot about prison when I was with them you know. This is their life you know. And to be there for them, you know what I mean? To be there for them. Because all the good years was taken away with [daughter] you know [appears upset]. That's all I have you know, so I just... I always maintain that I will always be there for them. And I am there today for them.

C: And that's helped you?

K: Yeah, yeah.

Pause

C: Is there anything that I have failed to ask or do you have any ideas or suggestions about how life sentence prisoners can be supported or is there anything that I haven't asked you think might be important?

K: I think life sentence prisoners should ask for help when they are in prison instead of trying to do it on their own.

C: Is there a real sense of that amongst life sentence prisoners?

K: Oh I think so there is yeah. I can do this. It's like an addiction you know, you can't do it on your own. You need to get help.

C: So it's a case of encouraging lifers to ask?

K: Yeah, that's what I would do. Because it wasn't there when I was there. It wasn't. Only for [psychologist] God knows what way I would have went.

C: So psychological support?

K: Of course. Or even talk among your selves. Talk to each other. Don't be isolating yourself you know what I mean? Talk it out, talk it through. Because you can't do it on your own. You can't, it can't be done. It's another form of addiction, to cope when you are in prison.

C: For that length of time?

K: For that length of time. You need to talk and you need to talk it through. Whoever you want to talk to, talk to a priest talk to a Governor, talk to a chief, talk to an officer, a doctor talk to who-ever.

C: Let it out and process it?
K: Processing it yeah.
C: Because if you don't you can't cope?
K: That's it. That would be my thing now that would be my suggestion.
C: And it's an important one.